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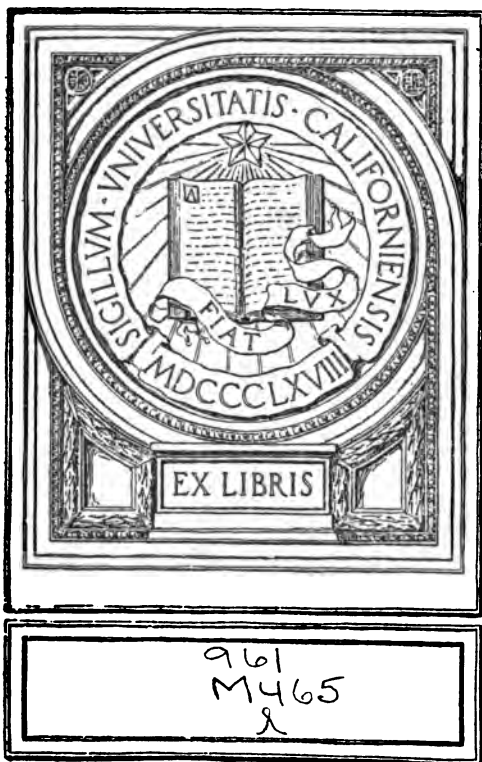
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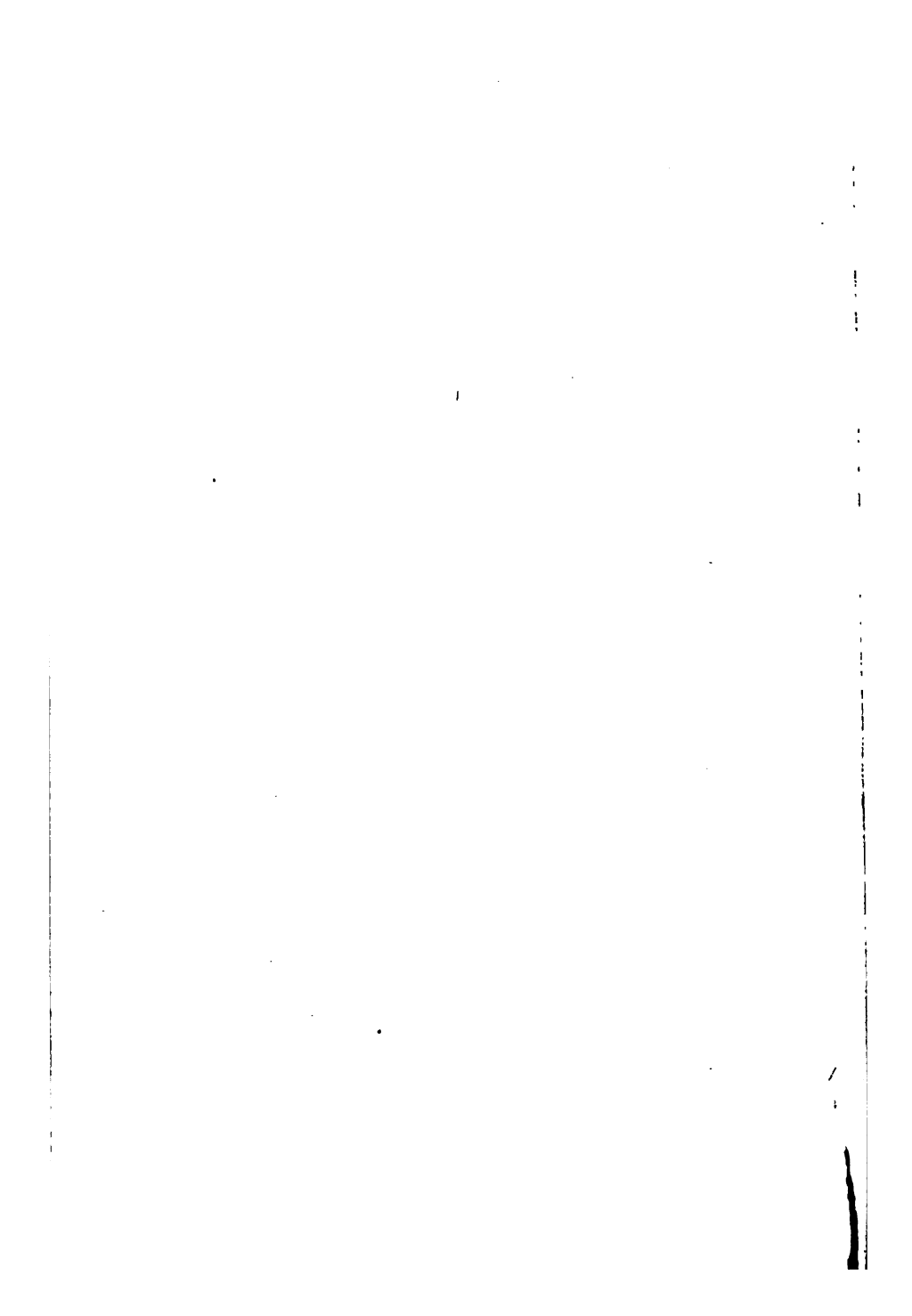
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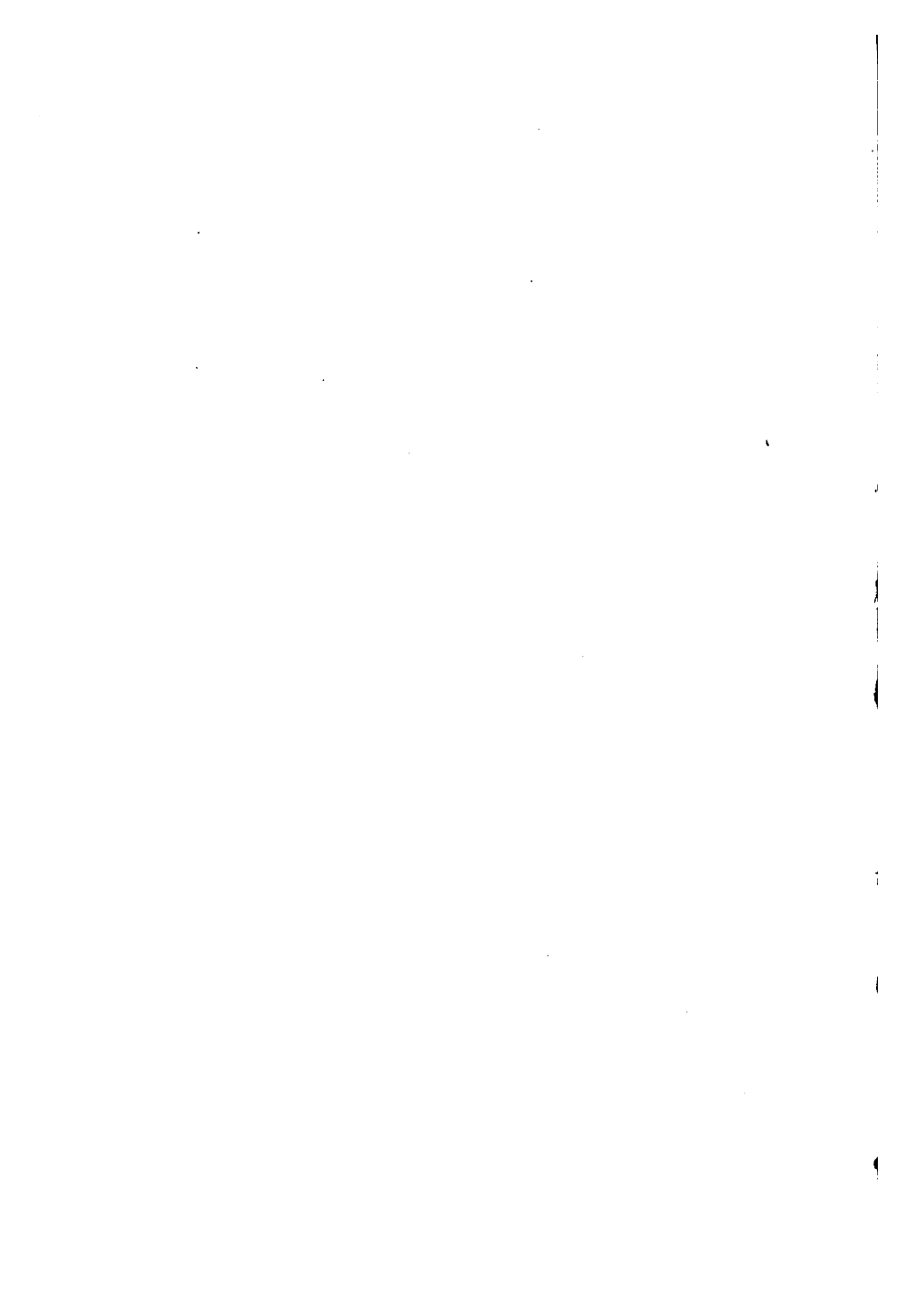
W. B. MAXWELL







LIFE CAN NEVER BE THE SAME



LIFE CAN NEVER BE THE SAME

By

W. B. MAXWELL

Author of

**THE DEVIL'S GARDEN, THE RAGGED MESSENGER
THE MIRROR AND THE LAMP, Etc.**



UNIV. OF
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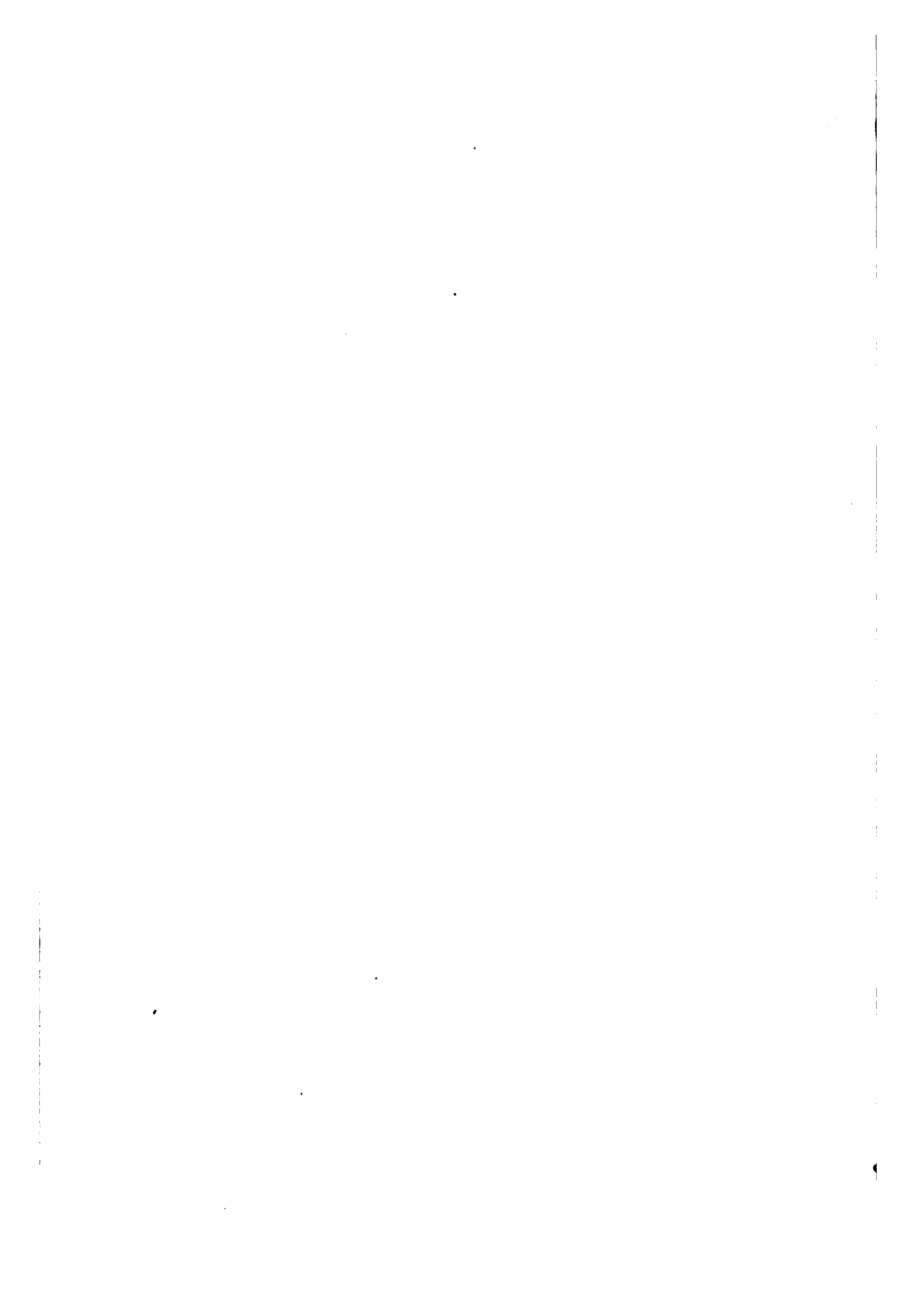
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LIFE CAN NEVER BE THE SAME

Life Can Never Be the Same

A GERMAN IN THE VILLAGE

THE people of Sainte Chose were very proud —taking pride in their country because it was France, pride in themselves because they were French, pride in their village because it was solid, well-built, pleasant of aspect, as French things ought to be; and also because no German had ever set foot in it. Not one throughout the war. This had been a rare piece of good fortune; for the invaders went far beyond Sainte Chose in 1914. Their Uhlans had poured through the villages to right and left, and on the returning flood had, alas, carried with them many prisoners and captives. "But so it has happened. Not a single German has entered our village. Monsieur can ask the mayor or the curé. They will tell monsieur the same thing."

Since 1915, when the line settled down three miles to the east of it, Sainte Chose had been occupied by British troops. It held an infantry battalion comfortably; every six or eight days the battalion in possession marched out to re-

lieve the battalion holding the line, and that battalion marched in; and so on, battalion after battalion, till, in course of time, with changing divisions, half the British Army seemed to have been here. There was nothing concerning the component parts of a battalion that the villagers did not know by now; they could have put an incoming battalion to bed in the dark, without the assistance of billeting officers.

"Battalion headquarters is here, at Emile Veuillot's—that is *me*, my Lieutenant. Your colonel's mess is opposite—at Monsieur Achille Nodier's. You will be well there. It is the best house. Your quartermaster's stores? Go forward. You are at Madame Binet's. Your transport will enter the fields behind the school. Stop not those wagons. Let them go forward down the hill to the first corner. Hold, my Captain, one platoon this way, into the barn. One platoon to the right, for the lofts above the stable. Yes, you will find a ladder. I have placed it there with my own hands—" and so on.

Summer and winter the village street was alive with British soldiers in khaki, horses and mules going to and returning from water, laden wagons passing, companies falling in for parade, sentries on guard, with military police at each end of it

to keep order, regulate traffic, and look at people's passes. It was a friendly invasion, of course, but the village seemed almost lost in the complete Britishness of it. English was the official language. Englishmen gave you permission to go to the nearest town; these foreigners told you when to put out your lights of an evening, when to open and shut your *estaminet*, when to keep away from the windmill on the hill; and they saw that you did it all. It was for your own good, of course, and you smiled and showed that you understood and did not resent the interference.

"Ah! What is that? Shells bursting near the windmill. Is it a bombardment, my Commandant? Do you wish us to descend into the cellars?"

"Oh, no, that's nothing. Only keep away from the hill until our artillery has made the silly fools leave off shooting."

In their own houses the inhabitants were pushed into corners to make room for the amiable invaders; naturally it had to be done, and they were handsomely paid for the accommodation they provided. But beneath it all, the wonderful, quiet, industrious French life went on unchanged. They were French; no swamping by foreigners,

even friendly ones, would ever change them. Old men, women, lads, girls and children, all of them that the war had left at home, continued their patient labors; nourishing the glorious French soil; tilling it, sowing it, making it yield its harvest, keeping it rich and prolific for happier Frenchmen, as yet unborn. Though the zone belonged to the British Army, they continued to govern themselves in their own way; they had their old rules and regulations, and enforced them in the midst of the new military arrangements; the *garde champêtre* took round notices and manifestos; French gendarmes came in and out, attending to local matters; and the mayor, the schoolmaster, the curé, the doctor from a neighboring village, and other notables, used to meet and have parish or district councils, or whatever they were.

One saw them of an evening some times in the kitchen at Monsieur Achille Nodier's farm-house, assembled either for business or friendly debate, sitting round a table, talking in a low voice, so as not to disturb the English officers in the mess-room close by.

They all got up when one of the officers came to the kitchen door and disturbed them by ask-

ing in his villainous French for the loan of something.

"Very willingly, my Lieutenant. If there is such a thing in the house, it is at your service. My wife shall search for it at once. Jeanne!"

And the English officer would of course apologize for inconveniencing them, beg them to sit down, and try to obliterate himself.

"No, no, no," said Monsieur Nodier. "You do not derange us. It is a pleasure."

They were all so courteous, these old fellows, so kind, so dignified; with the perfect manners that came to them as a birthright because they were French.

"How much longer, Monsieur," said the curé, politely making conversation, "is this terrible war to last?"

"Oh, it'll be over by next Christmas, we all hope."

"So much the better," said the mayor jovially.

"But you don't want it to be over until they are thoroughly beaten?"

"No, no, no. A thousand times no," said old Nodier, in his deep, strong voice, at full tone now, and with his eyes flashing. "They must be crushed, for the safety of France."

"For the safety of the whole world," said the mayor.

"Peace through victory," said the curé. "That is the peace we desire."

"Where they have trod they must be driven back—to the last German—and the countries set free again," said Monsieur Nodier; and he shrugged his huge shoulders. "Let it take twenty years, but let it be done. We have lost so much already, to lose a little more will not count. Otherwise, it would be too stupid."

Then old Madame Nodier came bustling back with the coffee pot, toast-rack, or whatever it was; the English officer bowed his thanks and withdrew; and their quiet low-voiced confabulations went on again.

"Give us peace, but give us victory first." That in effect was what all these villagers said, bearing the almost intolerable burden of the war with such fortitude and dignity; and they all shrugged their shoulders as they spoke of it. So many had lost those they loved, so many had lost almost all that makes life worth living, they had suffered so greatly. But their country must be saved, whatever happened to them. And the very soul of France seemed to shine from their faces as

they said it. "Too stupid to stop now, before the end is reached."

You could not live with them without respecting them; you could not know them well without loving them.

But they were not easy to know well; they were difficult to understand really. Perhaps a Frenchman can never really be understood except by another Frenchman. Their pride showed in a certain reticence, or perhaps it was only their natural good breeding which made them treat the English always as guests; they would talk freely of themselves if you proved yourself to be sympathetic and could persuade them that they were not thus boring you; but they rarely if ever told you about their most intimate private affairs, as the peasants and farmers of other countries always do.

The Nodiers and their house were typical of the rest of the village. Nodier and his wife had pushed themselves out of the parlors and dining-room on the ground floor, and made the kitchen their living-room; they had given up the whole of the first floor to their guests, and with their two servants, they slept in the attics of the second floor under the roof. A paper on the staircase door that led to this upper floor gently announced

that a small portion of the house was reserved for the family; and the announcement was scrupulously honored, even by the officers' servants and orderlies, who were always hunting for superior sleeping quarters. There were officers' chargers in the stables side by side with the farm horses; officers' servants hung tunics and breeches to dry on the cumbrous farm wagons; officers' grooms sat upon the pavement outside the kitchen windows polishing stirrup irons or whitening head ropes; and in the midst of it all Monsieur Nodier went about his work unconcerned, harnessed his team, went forth to his fields, came back again, summer and winter doing prodigies of labor with no one except a lame, smock-frocked old man to assist him.

He was big, robust, valiant, as strong as a giant in spite of his sixty-five years; and although he talked so quietly indoors, you could hear his voice a mile away across the open fields, as he shouted encouragement to his horses in the heavy plow. He seemed to be as gentle as he was strong, never goading his horses or rating the farm-hand; and it was really a pretty sight to see him in the orchard on a warm September afternoon, with a little deputation of neighbors' children, who had come to ask for apples.

"Here, you small birds. Fly away with these;" and he filled their aprons with the ripe fruit. "Go now to madame, and see if by chance she has a *brioche*. Would you like a *brioche*?"

"Oh, yes, Monsieur," piped the small birds in chorus.

And he picked up the youngest child, almost a baby, and carried it on his shoulder; through the archway, across the yard, to the kitchen.

"Jeanne! Of your charity, spare a cake or two for this angel and her companions."

Madame Nodier, as well as himself, adored children; and readily enough they would tell you about their own two—Achille, the elder boy, who was fighting for France, and Léon, the younger boy, who had already died for France.

Achille was in the artillery, now down in Champagne, and Madame Nodier showed his photograph—a splendid young fellow with brushed-up mustache, straight nose, thick eyebrows, and bold kind eyes.

"Yes, he is a good boy," said his father, courteously accepting any compliment that one offered.

"He is but twenty-seven," said Madame Nodier. "As happens often with us who are thrifty and think always of the future, my husband and I married late in life. It is a comfortable property

that we shall leave to Achille—if he survives. It is considerable, now that his brother's share will be his also. But in any event he would have had this farm, as the elder. He had chosen his wife, my Lieutenant, and they would have been happy here—and my husband and I, we should have been happy in watching their happiness.”

“And so you all will be, Madame, just as happy as you expected. The war will soon finish.”

“Alas,” said Madame Nodier, with a doleful sigh. And old Nodier gave her a friendly pat on the shoulder, and she went on with her work. She said no more. She was as old as her husband, but not a touch of gray showed in her black hair; she was quick of movement, alert, vigorous as a girl, and she looked very grand in her black dress when she went to Mass on Sunday mornings. Throughout the week, and except when in church, on Sundays too, she worked unceasingly. She had a smile always ready for the officers, and a kind word for the men. It was rare that she sighed, and never without reason.

If one had asked her, and made her believe that one was really and truly interested, she would have told one why she sighed now.

The girl that their beloved son was going to marry, had been taken captive by the enemy in

1914, and since then her relations had never received a word to tell them if she was alive or dead. Which should they hope for? Perhaps it was better to think that she had been killed. "Those others, they are very cruel; yet if she were alive, surely they must have allowed her to write one letter to us in all this time."

She was a cousin, Yvonne Nodier of the Nodiers of Telvillers, the village two miles away on the right. These Nodiers of Telvillers had not been so well-to-do, not so highly considered as the Nodiers of Sainte Chose. No matter. Yvonne was a nice, modest, self-respecting girl; well-favored, too, and accomplished. Her prosperous uncle and aunt had accepted her with open arms as a suitable bride for their boy. Her old grandfather would be able to leave her something—a well-filled stocking, if not land—enough. Money is not everything. When one has already sufficient, one should not be grasping.

At the outbreak of hostilities, Mademoiselle Yvonne set herself to do nursing in an amateur way. Beds for the wounded had been prepared at the *mairie* at Telvillers, and she and others of the village made themselves busy. The Germans came flooding forward, frightening people to death but doing little harm. Then, on the return-

ing flood, when they were being pushed back, they came through Telvillers again; and they took Yvonne and many other people "for hostages," as they called it. Now the old grandfather was dead, of a broken heart, it was said; his stocking and its contents had vanished; the house had been destroyed by a stray shell; other members of the family had been killed fighting; still others had migrated. The cruel war had utterly wiped out the Nodiers of Telvillers. Not a Nodier remained there to sigh over the fate of their poor Yvonne.

Suddenly, in the spring of 1917, the battle front began to roll away from the village of Sainte Chose. The enemy was giving ground, retreating to the famous Hindenburg Line, hotly pursued as he went. Soon he was ten or a dozen miles off. The villagers could plant vegetables on the hill now, and sow spinach round the windmill, without fear of being picked off by a shell-burst. Otherwise things were just the same. They still had a battalion billeted on them, the only difference being that the battalion belonged to a division in support, instead of to a division in the line.

"This way, my Colonel," said Monsieur Nodier, as usual, welcoming his guests. "Here is your

mess-room. Your bedroom is on the first floor. You will be well here;" and, courteous as ever, he would pay a compliment about the appearance of the troops as they marched in. "Your battalion made a good impression on all the village, my Colonel; and I can tell you, we are judges by now—we have seen so many."

It was about this same time, the time of the retreat, that a wonderful piece of news was brought from Telvillers.

Yvonne Nodier had returned.

She was there, at the house of Madame Durandy. She had arrived last night, exhausted, almost in rags, and had searched in vain for the house of her grandfather. Naturally all thought at first that she must have escaped from one of the villages just surrendered by the Germans in the retreat. But this was not so. Her story was far more remarkable. She came from Toulon; she had been safe in France for a long time, perhaps two years or more.

"You will hear it from her own lips," said the farmer-friend who had brought the news, as he grasped old Nodier's hand and shook it vigorously. "When you have heard her tale, you will take her to your heart. No one could blame her

nor think the worse of her for what has happened."

Monsieur Nodier harnessed his old white mare in the *charrette*, and he and madame drove across to Telvillers to see her who had been lost and was found.

She was properly dressed now, in borrowed garments, but tearful and shaky; and she shrank from her relatives when they came into Madame Durandy's parlor.

"Tell them all, Yvonne," said good Madame Durandy. "Neither they nor any one else can blame thee;" and she left them alone.

Then Yvonne told her marvelous tale. To begin with, she set their minds at rest. She had not been badly treated by the Germans. No, she had nothing to complain of on that score. She had been sent at once far into Belgium, and given work to do at a town close to a large prisoners' camp. There she soon came to know a French officer, and she helped him to escape. They got away together, and after terrible adventures—she shivered as she said this—they reached France and safety. In France she remained with the companion of her dreadful journey—first in Paris, where he was ill; then at Toulon, when he had returned to duty with the army; then at

Dijon, when he joined a regiment at the front. A month ago he was killed; and she, having spent the money he left with her, having sold her small possessions, being sick and unable to work, found her way back to Telvillers.

"He did not offer to marry you?" asked Madame Nodier.

"It was spoken of, but we were not married."

"What was his name?"

"The Lieutenant Henri Faguet, of the Infantry."

"And he is the dead father of your unborn child?"

"Yes, my aunt."

"But why did not you write to us?"

"I was ashamed;" and Yvonne dropped her eyes.

They asked her no further questions then. Each in turn embraced her, and five minutes afterward they had her safe in the *charrette*, and were driving her home to Sainte Chose.

"This is your home now, my child," said old Nodier, as he helped her out of the cart.

After that one saw her sitting in the kitchen when one went to borrow knives and forks—a pale young woman, dressed in black, who had not been there when one borrowed the egg-cups.

And if one looked at her, Nodier introduced one in a dignified formal style. "Let me present you to my niece, Mademoiselle Yvonne Nodier, who has come to live with us." He said no more, not telling this intimate family story to his guests. If one had known, one might have been touched by the old fellow's tender and chivalrous manner toward the girl. Even not knowing it, one felt that they made a pretty sight as they walked arm in arm through the orchard sometimes on spring evenings. He addressed her as his daughter until Madame Nodier stopped him. She herself was as kind as the kindest mother could be; but she had told Yvonne at once, with perfect candor and straightforwardness, that their son could not now marry her. There could be no thought of that, ever. He must have an untouched maiden for his wife and the mother of his children.

"No one blames thee, but that is understood, is it not?"

"Oh, yes, my aunt." The girl did not murmur against this verdict. "When comes Achille on leave next?"

"Not for two months."

"I will go away when he comes. I do not want to meet him."

"Yes, that may be better. It will arrange itself easily."

No one blamed her. Far from being thought badly of by the village, she was made a heroine. Her escape, the romantic wanderings with the French officer now dead, the fact that she would soon be a mother—all these things appealed to their hearts. They came to see her at the farm, bringing small gifts to show their unabated regard and esteem; and, greedy for details of her experiences, they would have pestered her with questions if they had not seen that it was painful to her to answer them. Then immediately they desisted, and instead of asking questions, told her news of the village to cheer her.

"She has passed through much," said a neighbor's wife sympathetically. "She wants to forget."

"Yes," said Yvonne. "I want to forget it all."

"Yes," said Madame Nodier, with a swift unnoticed glance at the girl. "She wants to forget."

Old Nodier had asked her if she learned to speak any German during her brief captivity, and she said, no, scarcely a word.

"All the better," said Nodier. "It is that much less to forget."

"You did not learn even a few sentences?" asked Madame Nodier.

"I was not there long enough. And, my aunt, I did not wish to learn. I pray I may never hear a word of their language again;" and Yvonne's pale face lit up, and her dull eyes flashed for a moment with the same fire that always showed in her uncle's eyes when he spoke of the hated enemy.

"Yes, that is the spirit," he said loudly; and he gave her a pat on the shoulder. "Put down your sewing now, and come with me for a turn among the apple trees. Have no fear of the English soldiers—they are respectful good boys."

"I follow you, my uncle;" and Yvonne folded the work that her aunt had given her—the little garments that would be wanted soon.

"One moment, my niece," said Madame Nodier. "I speak to thee once again of coming to Mass with me on Sunday. It is proper—or shall I say rather?—I would like to have thee there by my side for all to see. Will you not go to confession to-morrow? The curé awaits thee. He will be kind and gentle."

Yvonne sat down again and began to cry.

"I have no strength. I have no heart. I am ashamed. Let me wait till my baby is born. Then I will make my peace with the Church."

"Are you coming?" called Nodier from the courtyard.

"Be it so," said Madame Nodier. "We will wait till then. Now go to your uncle."

And she stood at the kitchen window and watched the girl crossing the yard. Her strong eyebrows were puckered by thought; her face became very sombèr as she stood there by the window thinking.

It was at night, on the second floor, in that small part of the house that the family had reserved for themselves; and, as had happened once or twice already, Madame Nodier came softly into Yvonne's room and watched the girl while she slept.

The candle was placed where its light would not disturb the sleeper. Except for the fact that the room was overcrowded with furniture, brought up here to give more space for the officers, it was all very nice and comfortable; sweet and clean; tidy and homelike—a room that from its aspect and atmosphere might have been hundreds of miles away from the war and the horrors of war. Not a sound came from the house or the village. The night was quiet and peaceful. Yet to watch Yvonne as she stirred in her sleep, to hear her rapid mutterings, little cries,

and sudden sharp, articulated sentences, made one's blood turn cold.

When she talked in her sleep like this, Yvonne spoke German.

*"Nehmen Sie die Hand von meiner Brust weg
 Ich gehöre den Offizieren, Ihre Dirne
 bin ich nicht."*

Madame Nodier did not understand a word of it; but the sound of the cursed language, here in the silence of the night, froze her blood.

"Um Gotteswillen, lassen Sie mich los."

And the girl gave another little cry.

"Yvonne! Wake," said Madame Nodier, with her hand on the girl's shoulder.

"My God, what is it now?"

"It is I. Have no fear."

Yvonne had sprung up in the bed, stretching out her arms as if to ward off danger, staring with panic-stricken eyes.

"Drink some of this milk;" and Madame Nodier fetched a glass from the side-table.

"Thank you, my aunt."

"Now lie down. And I will sit by you, like this—with my arm round you, to give you courage Now we can talk tranquilly Now you shall tell me the truth—all of it. It is proper that I should know. That

wonderful adventure, with the Lieutenant Faguet and the life as his dear friend, was not true."

"No."

"Tell me how things passed."

And Yvonne told her. It was a horrible tale, this, the true one.

She had escaped from captivity only the other day; when the Germans fell back, abandoning the villages that they had occupied so long. She had been at the village of Martincourt all the time, just twenty miles from here as the crow flies—close by, as one might say; seeing every day the road that led toward home, the road along which she and the others had come when they were driven like cattle by the mounted men. On her legs there were still scars made by lance prods, as the men goaded them to move faster. Madame Palissy fell on the road and was stabbed to death. André Giraud and Jules Fillon were shot. They were allowed to drink at the ditches by the roadside, but they were given no food for two days and one night. Except in this way the women were not maltreated. She believed that an order had been given by an officer at the beginning of the march.

"Yes," said Madame Nodier, "go on."

Then the first evening at Martincourt, Yvonne

had been told to wash and tidy herself, to act as servant; and she was set to wait at table at an officers' mess—"like the one in this house, my aunt; seven officers—but German, not English." And after dinner they played cards for her, making her understand that the winner was to win her as his companion. But she did not understand that the companionship was only for one evening, and that she would be with the others each in turn. After a little time, these troops left and more came in their place—"as they have done here, my aunt; but Germans, not English;" and she was told that she belonged to the officers, and would not be touched by the men if she behaved herself properly. She would only be given to the men as a punishment.

She owed gratitude to an old, gray-haired officer, who was town commandant, and remained so all the time. He protected her, saved her from much; and after a considerable period he took her altogether, keeping her at his own billet, and not letting new arrivals know about her. He was over sixty years of age, and seemed to grow fond of her. At any rate, he was unfailingly kind to her. He told her it was useless to try to communicate with her relatives, for no letter would be permitted to pass. But he allowed her to see

and talk with the old French priest of the village. The priest told her it would be wrong to commit suicide; she must suffer patiently, and she need feel no stain of sin in all the shame that had befallen her. And it was the old priest who eventually gave her the chance to escape, hiding her in a cellar when suddenly the place became all confused by the retreat going faster than the Germans expected, and an order coming for the troops to evacuate without waiting to destroy.

"But for him I would perhaps have killed myself. Others did." And she said how there was a pond, and the soldiers were frequently dragging it, and always when they dragged they drew out a body. With her own eyes she had seen the dead bodies of Adèle Delard and Clarisse Beauvais, two girls from Telvillers. The village was a hell for the unhappy French. The old men and young boys—the original inhabitants—were dreadful to see as they went in gangs to their digging; all white and feeble, like ghosts, moving so slowly; staggering under the light weight of a pick or shovel.

Here, then, she had continued to live, while others were dying, and the months, the years had passed. And then there came a new sergeant or orderly to her protector, the town commandant.

This man was a brute. He made her submit to be his mistress too, threatening her with death and worse than death if she complained to the commandant; laughing at her when she said she belonged to the officers; beating her with the scabbard of his side arm when she resisted. And this man was the father of her unborn child.

"My daughter, why did not you tell me the truth at once?"

"I dared not, my aunt."

"Call me not aunt, Yvonne. Call me mother. Say it now. Say it always henceforth."

"Yes, my mother."

The old woman was holding her in her arms, kissing her, soothing her.

"It is how I shall think of you always. My own daughter. Now sleep and be tranquil."

On a night three weeks later, there was movement in the reserved portion of the house, doors opening and shutting, footsteps; noises—but not sufficient to arouse or alarm English officers sleeping on the floor below. For some days a wise old crone from the bottom of the village had been in attendance, and even now, when the time had come, the doctor was not summoned to assist her. She was well skilled, able to administer

morphia, and needed no help. Indeed, since the war began, she had acted often in sole charge of cases more dangerous than this.

Madame Nodier herself took the child from her hands, and laid it in the arms of her husband, who stood waiting in the corridor below the sloped roof.

And then the wise old nurse had to come back into the room and tell the mother that it was a male child, born dead.

"Let me see him."

"No, cherished one," said Madame Nodier.

"He is not pretty to see."

"Oh, mother, let me see him."

"No, well-beloved."

"O Jesus Christ—in mercy, give me my little baby;" and she fainted.

Old Nodier had got out into the darkness of the courtyard, carrying his wrapped-up burden in his arms. Soon he was in the orchard with a lantern and spade. And down there by the poplars, away from the apple trees, he buried the child, just as he would have buried a dead dog.

One evening two or three days after this, a group of notables was assembled in the Nodiers' kitchen. They sat around the table talking earn-

estly but very quickly. The mayor, the doctor, the schoolmaster, and a man from a little distance, who seemed perhaps of more importance than the others, sat with their chairs close together; and facing them, side by side, sat Monsieur and Madame Nodier. The two servants had gone to bed after closing the shutters; some logs smoldered on the hearth; and in the candle-light the shining pots on the dresser, the tiled floor, and the polished woodwork looked cheerfully bright and clean. It was all homelike, comfortable, intimate.

"The circumstances have made a bad impression."

"That is to be regretted, Monsieur," said old Nodier.

Monsieur, from a little distance, had been saying that war is no excuse for neglect of the formalities and the proprieties. He said that there was a lot of talk—talk which had spread beyond the village—about recent events in this house. The birth of the child, with only an old *accoucheuse* present, the hasty unwitnessed funeral, the absence of any notification to anybody—these matters had naturally set people talking, and wondering. Not a single paper filled in and deposited. From the point of view of order, au-

thority, long-established usage, nothing could be more irregular or more regrettable. "What say you, Monsieur the Doctor?"

But just then there was a knock at the kitchen door, and a young English officer appeared. Instead of waiting, as usual, to borrow something, he had brought something with him; and, in his villainous French, he explained that the colonel wished madame to accept these two photograph frames as a trifling present.

"The colonel was at Doullens to-day, and seeing them there, he thought you might like them as a souvenir. The battalion will be moving soon."

They had all risen from their chairs, and all admired the photograph frames. Madame sent her grateful thanks to the colonel; Nodier offered thanks also on behalf of his wife; the mayor said it was a very charming idea. They were all courteous, kindly, smiling.

"I hope that mademoiselle is better," said the young officer.

"I thank you. She goes on famously. She will be down-stairs again in a week or ten days."

"We were all of us so sorry to hear she was ill."

"You are always kind and considerate."

"Good-night."

"Good-night, my Lieutenant."

Then, when the kitchen door had closed, they all resumed their seats and went on talking.

"My old friend," said the doctor, "blame attaches to you."

"You have acted wrongly and foolishly," said the more important visitor. "Speak now. Conceal nothing."

"I will give you the truth," said Nodier quietly. "Why should I not? I am not ashamed of it. The tale of my niece was a fable. She had been abused over there. Her child was a child of the enemy."

"Ah! That is sad."

"But," said the doctor, "the infant itself! Without professional knowledge, one can be deceived about still-born children. The signs of life can be misjudged."

"I did not misjudge," said Nodier. "The child was alive, till I killed it."

"Killed it?"

"Yes;" and he hit the table with his fist. "It was a German. A German in the village. What else should I do?"

"Did the mother consent?"

"Oh, no. A mother is always a mother."

And Madame Nodier added gravely, "Nature and God so ordain it."

"That is the truth, gentlemen. All may know it, except her."

"Yes," said the old woman, in the same tone. "She should never know—because what a mother feels is sacred. She, too, is sacred—because she has suffered with France and for France."

"And because of what she has suffered," said Nodier, "my son shall marry her, and while we live, we will try to make her forget."

"You will let your son marry her?"

"He would cease to be our son, if he did not wish to marry her when we tell him all."

RATHER LATE

THERE are probably no people, however dull and illiterate, who do not feel the need of living up to some ideal, who do not nourish comparatively lofty aspirations, who do not suffer in a vague muddling way, because their actual existence seems to fall short of what it might have been, what it ought to be.

Mr. Ringe, munitions worker, as he dressed for breakfast at his house in Bethnal Green, had a heavy sense that fate was thwarting him in an inexplicable but miserably complete style. Yet he ought to have been happy this morning. It was his birthday—age, forty; “in the prime of me ’ealth,” as he often boasted; with the lameness in the right leg that was chronic, but had never interfered with his work.

The lameness had prevented his going for a soldier. He had offered himself, and been refused—perhaps a blessing in disguise; certainly a blessing without any disguise at all for his wife and children, who had kept the bread-winner safe at home—so far. “Yes, me lady—so far.” He thought of the war, the glorious war. “For it is

glorious," he thought, "from the industrious point of view. The scarcity of butcher's meat, I grant you, is a denial. But 'oo 'as ever sin the same wide-spread prosperity all throughout the industrious world? The money—the good money—that is now made by all, not o'ny the skilled mechanic like meself, but the tradesman, the prer-fess'nal man, such as dentists, the unskilled 'and, any hobbled'eoy youth or 'ussy of a gell, yes, and kids, too—the money to be 'ad for the astin' is what none 'ave ever dreamt of before the war began."

And he thought of war-workers no better than himself to begin with, and their surprising accession to affluence—men with little shops, men with a few carts and horses, men who kept poultry or cured fish. Nothing originally, before the golden age of war began, but now risen to substantial fortune. And why had he not so risen, even a part of the way? The answer presented itself instantly:

"Becos I 'ave a millstone 'anging round me neck."

He brushed his hair rather fiercely, and glanced out of the window down into the back yard. It was a splendid summer morning, only five o'clock by solar time, the sky high and clear, the air all

fresh and sparkling. His own back yard was bare and grim in the sunshine—not so much as a row of beans planted in it. The yard next door was a picture. You could hardly see the yard itself because of the rabbit-hutches; and, already, there was his neighbor's wife in her bonnet and alpaca jacket, opening the little doors of her menagerie, putting in cabbage stalks and waste potato rind, glorying in the number, size and sprightliness of the rabbits. *That's a wife, that is.*

He went down-stairs.

"Breakfast ready?"

"Not quite," said Mrs. Ringe.

Not quite. No, that summed it up.

"Here you are," said Mrs. Ringe, putting a plate upon the table and removing the metal cover. "Bacan—and an egg! I wanted you t' have a good breakfast this morning."

Mr. Ringe's face had softened at sight of the rasher. Curiously enough, he had not smelt it; so that it came as a complete surprise. He spoke to his wife in a gentler tone.

"Why this mornin', particularly?"

"It's your birthday."

"Oh! Thought you'd forgot that."

"No, I hadn't forgot. I don't forget."

She was a pale, rather slatternly woman, and

yet one could still see that she must have been pretty once; even now, when she dressed herself properly, she was quite decent-looking.

"No," said Mr. Ringe, "you're one o' the sort that can't let bygones be bygones."

"It's easy for you to say that after what 'ap-pened last night."

A sudden impulse moved Mr. Ringe, and he got up from the table. He felt as if a wave of magnanimous emotion had floated him away from the hot tea and bacon.

"Ally!" And he took his wife in his arms and kissed her. "I'm sorry. Now don't let's ever 'ear another word about it. Is that a bargain?"

"All right—till next time."

"Now, now!" said Mr. Ringe severely. "No going back to it. I've said I was sorry, once for all." And he went on with his breakfast.

Mrs. Ringe had begun to cry; but she wiped her eyes, and even achieved a pallid smile.

"Many happy returns of the day."

"Thanks. Where's the children?"

"Up-stairs."

"Aren't they done dressing?"

"Not quite."

It was pleasant now in the kitchen, for a few minutes. Mr. Ringe finished his breakfast, lit his pipe; then, alas, unpleasantness began again.

"Why don't the kids come down?"

"P'raps they're afraid to."

"Afraid? What of?"

"Well, after what happened last night."

"I won't stand it!" Mr. Ringe struck the table with his fist, and shouted. He was terribly angry. "If you turn those kids against me, their own fawther, I'll chuck the 'ole blasted thing. I'm pretty near fed up as it is. But if you come between them and me—depriving me of their nat-chral love and affecshun, then I've nothin' left, and I'll chuck it."

Mrs. Ringe defended herself under this cruel accusation, with a pallid, forlorn sort of vehemence. She said she wondered anybody could talk both so silly and so wicked. She said when it came to a respectable man threatening to chuck his wife and family, only two explanations offered themselves. Either he had gone out of his senses, or he was running after another woman.

"Me! Another woman!" Mr. Ringe almost exploded from the stress of his indignation. He, the patient bread-winner, the model father, the perfect, long-suffering husband, to be accused of running after the petticoats! It was too rich—oh, much too rich! He opened the kitchen door, and

bellowed: "Tom, Alice, Maud! You come down-stairs this instant!"

The children appeared—a boy of twelve, two girls of eight and nine; and there was no getting away from the fact that they looked at their father apprehensively. He saw it at once.

"What! You shrinking away from me like that?" he asked severely. "D'you think I'm goin' to 'it you?"

They did not answer.

"Come 'ere."

They stood in a bunch close to their mother, by the door, and did not move.

Mr. Ringe sat down again and nodded his head gloomily. His anger had evaporated with extraordinary swiftness, and all kinds of different ideas invaded his mind. They were such uninteresting children, so poorly clothed, too, so slovenly of aspect, not even clean. There was nothing about them in which you could really take pride. They were not so fond of him as they ought to be; but then—and he knew it now, whatever he had fancied a minute ago—he was not really fond of them. He wished he had gone to his work, and left them up-stairs. But having ordered the parade, he must carry it through somehow.

"Tom," he said, "I ast you to answer me. When did I ever raise my 'and against you?"

"Whit Monday," said Tom.

"Oh! On the Bank 'oliday, my boy, it is true I gave you a 'idin', with your mother's full approval, for going to the cupboard there and getting at its contents. But I don't mean that at all. That was *punishment*. What I mean is, in an ordinary way I never touch any of you except as a caress. Then why should you be'ave as if you were afraid of me?"

Tom looked at his father in silence, as if he had been asked a conundrum and would prefer an easier one.

"Come 'ere, all of you, and kiss me."

They obeyed, pushed forward by their mother, who whispered some prompting words.

"Many 'appy returns, father."

"Many 'appy returns."

"'Appy returns."

"Thank you, my dears. Now you can go and wash your faces. They do wash them, don't they, Ally?"

"Of course."

The children went into the little scullery behind the kitchen; and, left alone, husband and wife made it up again. It was not quite such a good

making-up as the last one, and Mrs. Ringe did not stop crying so quickly.

"We were all going to buy you presents," she sobbed. "The children were full of it. Saved up—their—their money."

"I don't want no presents," said Mr. Ringe firmly. And he added that all he wanted was a happy home, a tidy, well-managed home, where love and peace reigned, and a man who was working himself to death could see some reward for his labors.

"And I was to ask you a favor," Mrs. Ringe went on, sniffing dolefully.

"What was it?"

"Sence it's your birthday, and you've the afternoon, to come 'ome early and give them and me a treat."

"What d'ye mean by a treat?"

"Well, to take us out—anywhere. On an omnibus—anything. All of us together—for a treat."

In imagination Mr. Ringe saw himself trapesing the gay Saturday afternoon streets with his slatternly lady and his poorly dressed children. The mental picture did not attract him.

"I 'ave to see me cousin Jack at three P. M." He had put on his hat and was going. "Matter o' business."

"Come 'ome after that. It'd be early enough."

"Look 'ere. I'll come 'ome as early as I can."

"You will?"

"Yes, I will."

"May I 'ave the children dressed ready for it?"

"Oh! You'd smarten 'em up a bit fer it, would you?"

"I'd do my best. Can I tell 'em you'll come?"

"No, don't do that. I don't want to promise what p'raps after all I couldn't pe'form."

He was going out into the dingy hall, and she followed him.

"You won't be *late* 'ome, will you?"

"No, no. Ta-ta."

"Remember, it's the full moon. I'm that nervous at night, alone with the children——"

He was gone.

He looked back and waved his hand as he hurried away. He was thinking that his was the shabbiest house in the street, the worst home, the most incompetent wife, the grubbiest, stupidest children. There were flowers in some of the neighbors' windows; new blinds and gaudy curtains flaunted in others—everywhere he saw the warlike signs of prosperity, and in the midst of it all he felt balked, misunderstood, a failure. Why were things not better with him? Simply because he had four millstones round his neck, keeping him down.

The munitions works at which he was at present employed were outside London, in the Ealing district. Work for him finished this Saturday at one P. M.; and at about four he was still in the Ealing district, with Cousin Jack and a party of friends, seated in the garden of a cheap restaurant. Tea had been ordered, and they would enjoy it here in the open air.

For a moment he thought of Ally and the kids. Too late for the afternoon treat now. Perhaps he would buy some cooked fish in the Whitechapel Road on his way back and give them a birthday supper. Then he dismissed this thought and went on enjoying the conversation. There were good talkers in the party; but it was nice give and take, each one getting a turn.

"Don't tell me but what the politician—and I don't care who he is—that's going to speak of a premature peace, well, he's going to find out he's made the biggest mistake of his life in insulting the intelligence of the country."

"It'd be so much treach'ry to the brave lads who are gone," said one of the ladies.

"No, this has got to be fought to a finish. We've all got to keep a stiff upper lip and go on doin' our bit—each in his own way."

"Otherwise the whole thing would begin over again."

"Not in our time, p'raps."

"I ain't so sure o' that, either."

"Look at that boy," said another lady. "Lost his arm, he has."

The garden was full of people. There were girls dressed as pretty as fairies, comfortable, friendly groups of elders, nurses in uniform, and many soldiers, several of them wearing the hospital blue. To some of these one of Mr. Ringe's friends spoke jovially.

"Are we down-hearted?"

"NO!" said the wounded in loud chorus; and they laughed good-naturedly.

Truly it was impossible to be down-hearted. The sun shone, delicate streamers of white cloud glided at a fabulous height in the limpid sky, sounds of happy voices filled the air. Presently two unseen musicians began to play upon a mandolin and a piano. It was all so pleasant. There was a gaiety, an animation, a sense of holiday making that one never had on Saturday afternoons before the jolly old war began.

But beyond these general feelings of satisfaction and the relief from morbid thought, Mr. Ringe took a special pleasure in the presence of one member of the company. This was Mrs. Yates. She was a comparatively new acquaint-

ance of Jack's wife, and Mr. Ringe had met her several times before. He had rather expected to meet her to-day, rather hoped to do so, perhaps—for between them, although nothing whatever had passed, there had arisen as it seemed to him, a subtle and mysterious sympathy, like that of two kindred souls floating high above the realms of matter, touching, dancing away again, and then reuniting in the ethereal maze. Mr. Ringe, with his billycock hat tilted forward over his nose and a pipe in the corner of his mouth, felt that he and Mrs. Yates were doing all that again now, as from time to time they glanced at each other without speaking.

"Hullo. Here we are. Tea. Now, miss, rations are rations; but if that's supposed to go round among—oh, all right. More to follow! *Bon. Tray bon.* We leave ourselves in your fair 'ands, young lady. You won't let us starve."

They did not starve. They had a hearty meal; and more and more Mr. Ringe felt himself penetrated, wrapped round by the varied charms of Mrs. Yates. Outwardly she was a neat trim woman of say thirty-five, with beady brown eyes, a high complexion, and a vigorous, determined carriage of the head and body. Her figure was beautiful and substantial. Her costume was fine with-

out being excessive, ladylike and yet not sloppy. Inwardly she shone as a gay choice spirit; showing herself quick as lightning in repartee if chaffed, able to hold her own in serious debate—obviously a person of superior education.

“Look ’ere,” said Mr. Ringe. “Fair’s fair. I ought to have mentioned, p’raps, that I’m a married man.”

“Married, are you?” said Mrs. Yates. “Well, so am I.”

“Oh! Thought you were a widow. ’Usband living, is he?”

“I’ll tell you about that later,” said Mrs. Yates, smiling.

It was half past six now, and Mr. Ringe had got no nearer home than Hammersmith. The party breaking up, he and Mrs. Yates had somehow drifted off together. They had come as far as this on a tram-car, and were now sauntering along the crowded pavements arm in arm. Not a word had been said about their spending the evening together.

“No, you don’t surprise me by the fact of being a married man. I guessed that first time I saw you.”

“How so?”

"By your face. Your countenance is the sort that gets snapped up before its owner reaches the age of thirty-two. You are thirty-two, aren't you?"

"Go on. I'm *forty*!"

"Never?"

"Yes, I am. Forty years of age to-day. To-day's my birthday."

"No?" Mrs. Yates gave his arm a delightful little squeeze of impulsive friendliness. "A birthday boy! Then I must drink your health over our snack."

"What say? Oh! Just so."

He had not thought of taking another snack so soon, but it seemed a good idea. There were plenty of cheap restaurants to choose from.

They sat long at table, and Mrs. Yates was very arch and fascinating, drinking his health and calling him a gay deceiver. But she could pass from gay to grave in a moment. She was all womanly sympathy when he told her that, far from being a gay deceiver, he was a very unhappy man. And he took pity from her. Without disloyalty he hinted at the darker side of his domestic life, and she pitied him. Her pity was as stimulating as her sprightliness.

"Who's to blame?" she sighed. "I can't seem

to understand it. You're not a drinker. I saw that at once when you ordered the small bottle."

"I don't drink," said Mr. Ringe earnestly. "I don't *care* for drink. I'm sober and honest. There's no one 'as done 'is bit steadier than what I 'ave throughout this war."

"Ah," and she sighed again. "I've had to deal with toppers in my time. That's what breaks up a home. . . . Mr. Ringe, when married life goes wrong, the blame is due to one partner or the other. And I don't believe it's *your* fault."

They went to a small music-hall, still in the Hammersmith district; and as he followed her up the stone staircase to the circle, he kept thrusting at her waist with his fingers.

"'Urry up, my dear, or all the fun 'll be over."

"Let me alone, can't you? I'm ashamed of you."

At every touch he could feel how solid she was. Nothing slack or slommacky about Mrs. Yates—all firm and trim and decided, from the top of her hat to her quick-moving heels.

It was a poor show, but Mr. Ringe enjoyed himself enormously. More and more he surrendered to the fascination of his charming companion. Whenever the music and the singing permitted, he talked to her about himself; telling her everything now; feeling it as an immense relief to open

his heart thus to a cultivated, highly-educated woman who wasn't born yesterday; pouring into her sympathetic ear more and more details of his wrongs and suffering.

"So last night—no supper, nothing ready for me—I own I lost me temper."

"I'm not surprised."

"An' pushed her. 'Set about it,' I says, an' give her a push. Now, believe me, it was no more. I laid my 'and on her arm like this——"

"All right. You needn't act it. I understand."

"An' I says: 'Set about it. Quick! See?' An' I give her a push. 'Oh,' she says, 'you brute, to strike a woman,' and begins to 'owl loud enough to wake the neighbors. An' I 'adn't struck her. See?"

In his often interrupted but unceasing monologue he went on to describe how the noisy lamentations of Mrs. Ringe had scared the children, how they also began howling, and how they and their mother had cried and fussed about it half through the night. He had felt it as undermining the children's affection for him, and had said so. Then magnanimously he had made friends over it—and he reached the climax of the narrative. He said he felt now that he could not go on with life under such conditions; he was fed up with it; he had a

jolly good mind to go into the army under another name and desert the wife and kids forever.

"How could you go into the army? You say yourself you're lame."

"It doesn't interfere with me."

"But you limp a bit."

"Nothing to stop me. They ain't so particular as they used to be."

"Oh, I shouldn't go and do anything rash."

"It's what I shall do, unless——"

Then the orchestra struck up the tune of *The British Grenadiers*, and a man dressed like an officer and a gentleman stepped smartly on the stage. This performer had a large white cloth instead of a painted scene behind him; he made a brief but stirring speech about the war; then immediately the lights were lowered and a cinematographic picture of the king was thrown upon the screen and welcomed with loud applause.

"Who are the leaders we can trust?" asked the performer; and there followed pictures of Sir Douglas Haig, Mr. Lloyd George, and other celebrated persons. Each was received with loud plaudits. There were many soldiers in the audience, and they cheered enthusiastically whenever the portrait of a soldier appeared—not always sure who he was, not even sure that it was

not a poor portrait of their own colonel. But all the more reason to cheer.

"What are we fighting for?"

The orchestra played *Home, Sweet Home*, and the picture on the screen showed a sad and anxious-looking woman leading a child in each hand as she came out of the gate of a cottage garden. Yes, we were fighting for home, for the women and children of England, just as surely as if we were getting killed on Clapham Common instead of in the Somme Valley. The applause was terrific.

Mr. Ringe could not talk during this turn, but the darkness allowed him to take his companion's ungloved hand and fondle it respectfully. She did not resist the caress, she even seemed to respond in a delicate, refined way. And while the soldiers shouted and the orchestra played the well-known, patriotic tunes, he felt the uplift of it all. Great thoughts seemed to be finding birth in him. Why shouldn't he distinguish himself as a warrior, strike sword-blows instead of making shell caps, rise high in the service, come home safe and sound at last as a general? It seemed to him he could do it—something grand and tremendous—if only he had any one who, understanding his temperament, would encourage him and egg him on.

"What's the time?" asked Mrs. Yates, when the turn was over.

"Quarter to nine."

"Well, if we're going to get any refreshments we'd better slip out now, or we shall be caught napping by closing time."

"Don't go and act foolish," said Mrs. Yates.

They were in a noisy crowded bar, but they had secured two chairs and a little table by the wall, and they sat almost nose to nose, as they had their drink and talked to each other. The crowd did not disturb them; Mr. Ringe had a sensation of being quite alone with her, wrapped round and hidden from prying eyes by clouds of tobacco smoke.

"London isn't the only place in the world," she continued. "There's munitions making all over England. You're worth your money anywhere. Well, then, if you feel you can't stand it any longer—if you're fully determined to desert 'em, and turn over a new leaf, and make a fresh start, why not go up north, right away? Change your name. That's sensible enough. Begin a new life. Make a new home."

"It's what I'll do."

"But you'd want some one to take care of you;"

and her face was close to his, the small brown eyes glowing, the complexion all bright. "Well, why not make me Mrs. Ringe—or whatever the new name is to be?"

Mr. Ringe looked into her eyes and seemed to be looking into an abyss.

"D'you mean bigamy?" He whispered the word with a stammer.

"Oh, I'm like the Germans," said Mrs. Yates. "I'm not to be stopped for a scrap of paper—or the want of it."

He tittered feebly. She made him feel giddy; she was so charming, so ardent, and yet so matter-of-fact. She said something very eloquent about the war having destroyed all petty prejudices, and wedding bells and marriage lines not now being necessary to the union of hearts; and then she explained that she had her own reasons for wishing to change her name and leave London. Her husband—if he was her husband—and she wasn't too sure about that—was due back on his ship, and she had no intention of waiting to welcome him. She had got on all right without him for two years, and she never wanted to see him again.

"But he'd trace us—I mean, wouldn't he follow you up?"

"Not he. Besides, how could he? . . .

Well, what do you say? I'd make you comfortable. I know what men want. I've had a lot to do with men."

"You 'ave?"

She took up her glove, and gave him a little flip with it on the face.

"You're keepin' me waitin' for an answer.

. . . oh, lord, what's that?"

It was the unmistakable sound of gun-fire.

"'N air raid!" said Mr. Ringe, springing up from the table. "Those cursed 'Uns 'ave come back again."

The barroom was emptying itself slowly, and he pushed his way through the press, followed by his companion.

"Which way you going?" he asked abruptly.

"I'll go your way a little way. No such hurry, is there?"

"Yes, I've got to get 'ome—long journey. I want to catch District train. I promised not to be 'ome late."

Outside in the streets no one was hurrying. People strolled along laughing and chatting; but the great beams of the search-lights swept the sky, whistles sounded, and the guns made a tremendous racket. At each bang Mr. Ringe stepped out more briskly.

"When shall I see you again?" panted Mrs. Yates. "I—I can barely keep up with you."

"I dunno—not for certain."

"Stop a moment—and I'll give you my address, where you can write to make an appointment."

"No, keep moving. Tell me in the train."

There was a crowd at the Broadway Station, and somewhere in the crowd he mislaid Mrs. Yates and did not find her again. No matter. She was a capable woman who could find her own way all right. She was not a bit afraid. Nobody in this crowded train seemed to be afraid, nobody in the whole of the West End of London, perhaps, was afraid—except himself. And he was afraid because he was in the West End instead of the East End, where the bombs would probably fall if any bombs fell. A cold superstitious fear had seized upon him.

It passed off in a minute, before the train had reached West Kensington. Nonsense.

At Earl's Court everybody was told to get out of the train.

"When's the next train for Whitechapel?" he demanded excitedly.

"Ask the Germans," said the official. "There won't be a train for Whitechapel till the raid's over."

Then the fear returned to him. No train? No bus? No means of getting home? It was one thing to be dead sick of them, to mean to leave them forever; for they would, normally, get on very well without him, better than with him, perhaps. It was quite another thing to think of them in momentary peril, terrified, cowering, and himself miles away, when he had promised to be with them and had broken his promise. Outside Earl's Court Station he looked at the sky—tiny streamers of faint cloud at an immense height that might have been anything; bright moonlight, so bright that you could not see the stars, and could barely see the search-lights. The anti-aircraft guns whizzing and twanging and booming. Must get home. He ran.

The perspiration was pouring off him, and his lame leg was giving him intense pain when he came out into the main road west of Kensington High Street. There were some military lorries moving slowly in the right direction, and with an extraordinary effort he scrambled up on the back of one of them. To his disgust the lorry turned round at Knightsbridge and dived into the Brompton Road. He jumped off, slipped, fell, got up, and ran again. Then by luck he saw a chock-full belated omnibus, and, jumping on that, went for-

ward in the right direction. The conductor made trouble, stopped the 'bus, told him to get off the platform, and with breathless excitement he stated his necessity.

"I 'ave to get 'ome. See?" And he appealed to the whole 'bus-load, the whole universe, for assistance in his extremity. "Must get 'ome somehow. My 'ome is in Bethnal Green, which is prob'ly bearing the brunt of these in'umin fiends."

"They haven't dropped anything yet," said a man in khaki.

"Is that so?"

"Yes. Here, take my place. . . . Drive on, conductor."

The omnibus went no farther than Charing Cross, and beyond that omnibus traffic seemed to be suspended altogether. In the Strand the quiet aspect of things steadied his nerves, made him feel that his fear was ridiculous. Nevertheless he jogged along. Then at Wellington Street he saw parties of refugees, foreign Jews, men and women with bundles, hurrying for shelter. This unnerved him, and a few minutes later he heard what he felt certain was the crash of exploding bombs. It was unmistakable. He had heard it several times before—quite different from the

sound of the guns. There again it was, straight ahead of him, in the east; and once more he ran fast.

He had said that the lameness would not interfere with him; and it did not, but the pain was almost unbearable. His ankle seemed to be on fire; the bones of his leg seemed to strike on the stone pavement, and the concussion pierced his thigh joint with red-hot nails—and still he ran on, faint, gasping, despairing. “Said I wouldn’t be late anyhow—an’ she said she was that nervous if left alone.”

The “All clear” signal had been given long ago when he got to Bethnal Green, and came limping toward the corner that led to his street. Things had been reassuringly quiet and orderly in the main thoroughfare—omnibuses and trams at work again; only one fire-engine going westward, suggesting that there had been trouble or an alarm of trouble somewhere. The fear had gone; only a little anxiety mingled with his great fatigue. Then, as he turned the corner and saw the end of his street, he nearly fainted.

There was a crowd, a fire-engine, hose pipes, policeman, firemen in helmets.

“Stand back.”

"Lemme pass. I'm a tenant. Me own property. Wife and kids. Don't you try to stop me. See?"

He was struggling wildly in the arms of two plethoric special constables, and pushing them backward through the crowd into the open space beyond. A fireman lent a hand and they overpowered him. Then it was all like a nightmare. The street had been bombed, many houses had been demolished, perhaps other houses might fall in at any minute. But presently, on his promising to go quietly and behave like a sensible person, he was taken down the street to see for himself.

His home had vanished utterly. At the end of the street there was a yawning rent in the houses; where his home had been there was nothing but an immense rubbish heap of smoldering beams and red-hot bricks, played on by fountains of water. His own house, the houses of his next-door neighbors, the yardful of rabbit hutches, everything had disappeared in smoke and horror. The street itself had gone, with its pavement and lamp-post. He stood in the cruel moonlight, on the edge of a bottomless crater, raving and yelling.

"Th' in'abitants. Th' in'abitants. Is they all done for?"

They made him understand that everybody had been warned to get out and run for the borough

shelter. Anybody who did not act on the warning was lying under all that.

Then he was like a madman, wanting to stop the fire-engine and dig among the hot bricks with his own hands, fighting, yelling. A clergyman appeared from nowhere, and led him away, exhausted. Why despair? Why doubt Providence? Let us come and hunt for your dear ones.

They were not at the shelter. It had been emptied and shut up. They might be at the school in Raymond Street, where other refugees had been sent. And they *were* at the school. Directly he entered the schoolroom door he saw them—his whole family, a forlorn little group apart from the others, hatless, dirty, miserable; the wretched woman crying; the children clinging to her and trembling.

Now would have been the time to desert them. They had not yet seen him. After all, they were alive and safe; but homeless, without beds, wardrobe, crockery, cooking utensils; everything gone from them, everything to be provided for them. But he did not want to desert them now.

"Ally! Well, my dears!"

He was kissing his wife's wet face; he was hugging his grubby children.

The clergyman and kind ladies said that they

would all be given beds and blankets for the night at a building in Church Place. This lady would lead them there; and presently they were meekly following the lady through the now silent streets.

He squeezed his wife's arm and patted Maudie on her bare head as they walked along. Each of the children clutched in its right hand a small object wrapped in paper.

"What 'ave they got in their 'ands?" he asked. "Biscuits?"

"No, it's your presents what they bought for you. I couldn't get 'em out of the house without 'em. Maudie there, she left hers and ran back for it, making the policeman that angry."

Then Mr. Ringe began to cry.

"Ally," he said tearfully, "don't you fret about all this. It's all right;" and he blew his nose resolutely. As he spoke, he felt the uplift again; the war spirit, stimulated by the pictures and patriotic tunes at the music-hall, stirred in him again; but it was the real spirit now, not a false one.

"Ally, it's a blessing in disguise. London isn't the on'y place. I'm sick of it. I ain't done well 'ere. I ain't treated you well 'ere. I'll turn over a new leaf, make a fresh start. I'm worth the money anywhere. We'll go up north. We'll make

a new 'ome, an' start fair in it, with bygones as bygones. I'll do better, we'll be 'appier in the new 'ome? See?"

CHRISTMAS IS CHRISTMAS

IT was the first Christmas Day that the Tenth Battalion spent in France; and, as they thought at this period of their history that it was also the last Christmas Day they were to spend in France, they made rather a fuss about it.

Turn and turn about with a battalion of another brigade, they were holding a nice attractive bit of the line with a still nicer and more attractive village three miles behind it; one battalion in the trenches, the other battalion in the village as support; and for six weeks the Tenth had been calculating how the turns would come about with regard to Christmas. According to the calendar, if the times for reliefs were not altered, if no accidents occurred, it looked as if the Tenth would be out of the trenches and snug in Sainte Chose for their Christmas dinner, and they so laid their plans; but one dreaded accidents—this war was so full of them—and one had an unworthy suspicion that the general officer commanding the other brigade might somehow do the dirty and get his lot out for the festival instead of ourselves.

However, it all happened as the Tenth wished. The other brigadier attempted no wrangling with the higher command; he was a gentleman, second only in gentlemanliness to their own brigadier; and on the twenty-third of December they came down from the line, plastered with mud, but happy as birds at entering the comfortable nests afforded by their beloved village.

The Tenth had fallen in love with it at first sight when they marched in last September and saw the white-walled *mairie* and schoolhouse, the apple orchards with the ripe fruit, the *estaminets* with flowers in the windows, and the friendly French people at the house doors with welcoming smiles on clean kind faces; and ever since then their affection for it had been deepening. It really was a topping village for billets. The farm-houses and cottages were so solidly built, the barns and lofts were so commodious, and as yet it had suffered so little from shell-fire. There were little shops like Whiteley's contracted into one small front parlor; eggs, butter, and other delicacies were plentiful; the inhabitants had now become bosom friends of the battalion and would do anything for one. No wonder the Tenth thought themselves in clover there, and wrote home saying, "This place, which I may not mention its name, is A1. There are nice girls in it, but you need not

be jealous, Katie, for they all have French sweet-hearts in the French Army. They can make coffee a treat, and the French beer is not so bad as I used to think. Altogether we seem at home here, and you feel as if you were hundreds of miles away from the war."

Yet in fact one was only three miles as the crow flies from the German front trenches, and you had not to go far from the crossroads by the *mairie* before the war announced itself again in its usual ugly way. Four roads met at the corner by the *mairie*; and two of these were, so to speak, innocent peaceful roads that took you back to other inhabited villages, and two were wicked roads that led you forward to desolation and the cruel business of fighting. One of the two bad roads forked immediately, thus making a third forward road. It was the left fork that the battalions used when going to this special place of business. You went up a gentle slope between the comfortable farm-houses and courtyards that were B Company's main billet, battalion headquarters, the colonel's mess, A Company's headquarters; then you came to some shattered tenantless cottages; you passed the apple orchards and poplar trees that formed a fringe to the village and in summer hid it completely, a crucifix still standing untouched on a high bank, a clump

of somber fir trees; and after that you were out in the open waste, with nothing between you and the trenches except a roofless ruin that had once been the quadrangle of a large farm, a pile of white stones that was a windmill, and the brown sea of weeds that used to be rich cornfields. It was a rapid and striking transition from the normal aspect of the village to this wild heath, the belt of devastation that stretched away on either hand as far as the eye could see. As well as the high road, always empty of life in daylight, there were tracks over it used by artillery wagons and the regimental limbers; here and there one came upon sunken roads that ran for a little way parallel to the line; and the whole place was full of traps formed by weed-covered shell-holes, disused trenches, old gun pits. Almost every inch of it had been fought over in the early days before the line settled down in its present position. Riding across it in the day-time, one was often startled by finding one's self close to troops before one had guessed that there was anybody else moving within a mile of one. It was so big, so empty, so utterly forlorn, so dead that it seemed to swallow every sign of life. The dull brown tints of the rank vegetation absorbed into themselves the color of khaki tunics; the faint

wintry sunshine refused to flash on the men's accouterments; and platoon after platoon could go plodding along the mud tracks without betraying their presence, unless you chanced to hear the sound of a voice, or the rhythmic creaking of equipment that told you men were marching in step *somewhere*.

On the innocent roads that led backward from the village it was quite a different story. There, all was animation and comfort. One passed through endless wagon lines of artillery and army service corps; lorries were active; red-hatted staff officers in motor-cars came spinning along, and their soldier chauffeurs hooted at huge farmers' carts blocking the way; sentries saluted; military police asked you where you were going; the fields were being tilled by bent old peasants; boys and girls were tending the cattle. The village a mile or so back was divisional headquarters, with a château for the general and a street full of offices for his staff. Two miles behind that a bigger village was army corps headquarters, with another château for the general, three streets of offices, squadrons of cavalry, more military police, a prisoners of war camp, all sorts of wonderful things. And still farther back were the railway, the channel ports, England. It cheered one and

bucked one up only to look in that direction and think where one would get to—if one went far enough.

The Tenth Battalion liked to do things in style, and they spared no expense in making Christmas at Sainte Chose a matter to be remembered. They had been further heartened and encouraged in their efforts by confidential literature from the higher command, which said it was desired that, as far as possible, the day should be enjoyed as a holiday by the troops out of the line. It should not, of course, be forgotten that war is war—but, within reasonable limits, officers commanding units might remember that Christmas is Christmas.

The festivities began on Christmas Eve with a grand children's party for the inhabitants. At three P. M. one saw the guests arriving at the schoolhouse next to the *mairie*; mothers, aunts and grandmothers issued from the clean and comfortable billets leading little children dressed like fairies, with shawls wrapped round their finery; groups of young girls stood shyly in the roadway, not giggling and nudging one another as girls of other countries would on such an occasion, but looking desperately serious, as all French people do in moments of slight embarrassment.

"This way. Come along," said young English officers, welcoming the guests.

"I thank you, my Lieutenant."

"Ah, Mademoiselle Louise. How smart you look. What a lovely costume. And this is your little brother, Pierre? Come along, Pierre, and I'll find you a good seat near the tree."

When the guests entered the big schoolroom they gave little cries of admiration and delight. The small scholars could scarcely recognize it as the place of toil and boredom to which they were accustomed. All the candles had already been lighted; flags of the Allies were festooned across the high ceiling; three immense tables were spread out with all the requisites for a sumptuous English tea; and at the far end of the room stood a noble Christmas tree profusely laden with toys. The toys were so many that a table of them had been arranged as a tombola in charge of the quartermaster, while a further overflow were to be got rid of by the padre with a bran pie. But tea first.

"Give yourself the trouble to sit down, Madame. This way, Mademoiselle Clotilde."

Soon then all were seated; the matrons sandwiched in between their shy little relatives or in groups at the heads of the tables; the mayor, the

schoolmaster, and other village notables strolling about; the English officers acting as waiters, carrying plates of cake, cutting well-intentioned and totally incomprehensible jokes in what they believed to be the French language, each of them of course paying special attention to the family, of his own billet. For a few minutes it was rather a silent party; then the shyness wore off, the naturally glib tongues were unloosed again. Even before the crackers were handed round the noise had become sufficient to satisfy the hosts that their party was a success. The crackers were something entirely new to Sainte Chose, and the screams and laughter amid the sharp explosions proved how much they were appreciated. Young ladies of eighteen allowed officers to assist them in putting on the paper head-dresses; the quartermaster crowned his landlady, old Madame Binet, with a red cap of liberty—it was all very jolly and homelike. As one looked along the table, at all the smiling faces, heard the babel of happy voices, and saw the little girls just as prettily dressed as children at a party in Portland Place or South Kensington, one seemed to be a thousand miles away from the rotten old war. Truly it was a pretty sight.

After tea the tables were moved, the children

filled the floor space, and the distribution of toys began. Old farmers returning from work came to see the fun. The doors were thronged with elders going in and out. The regimental medical officer entered fully disguised as Santa Claus and was scarcely noticed. Non-commissioned officers in appropriate costume sang music-hall songs and were not listened to. The children were enjoying themselves now without restraint; the party was a terrific success.

Yet, in spite of the crowd and the noise and the gaiety, one little girl of ten gradually had attracted the notice of everybody and became, as it were, the belle of the ball.

"My Colonel, grant me this pleasure;" and she asked the C. O. to pull a cracker.

"Indeed I will;" and the colonel immediately fell in love with her.

And so it was with everybody else. Yet she did not push herself forward; she was soberly, even shabbily, dressed compared with the others; she was by no means the prettiest child there. She was quiet and unassuming, with an earnest little face, a serious voice, and the perfect manners of a grand lady of sixty; she was irresistible. "Yes, yes, it is Antoinette," said the French people. They made quite as much of her as the English did.

She lived with her Aunt Rosine at the farm occupied by the regimental transport, and men of the transport section knew her well. They would tell you how she seemed to run the whole farm for Rosine, taking the cattle to the fields and bringing them back, making out lists of things to be purchased when her aunt went to market at Doullens, preparing meals for the children while auntie was away; and in leisure moments acting as amateur line orderly, telling the transport sergeant that two of his heavy draught horses had broken loose or the old spotty-faced mule had got cast again.

"Yes," said the mayor, speaking to the colonel, "that child is a little heroine. She has been in the hands of the Germans, my Colonel, in the early days, with all her family. They escaped, I know not how. But the family is no more—the father killed in battle, the mother dead—and the aunt has given her shelter."

And the schoolmaster praised her as highly, saying how quick she was at her book, and how she had been exempted from school as indispensable to Madame Rosine.

"That child," said the schoolmaster, "would carry the whole village on her shoulders;" and he reminded the mayor that it was Antoinette

who had given the warning when Monsieur Nodier's barn caught fire. "She has seen the smoke and runs straight to the *mairie* with the alarm." But for Antoinette half the village might have been burned.

"It is true, all that he relates, my Colonel."

Because of her popularity Antoinette seemed in danger of getting rather more than her strict share of the toys, but she herself was careful to prevent this happening.

"I thank you, but excuse me, I beg," she said, with a grave smile. "Give that to another. You have overwhelmed me already."

"Watch her now," said Madame Giraud to a neighbor. "See, she gives her doll to Hortense, because she knows that Hortense is lame and sits all day on the hearth."

"That," said Madame Veuillot, "is what Antoinette does ever. She thinks only of others. Yes, we are talking of you, Antoinette. Come and give me a kiss."

"Jarvis," said the colonel, for a moment touching on business as the transport officer passed him. "Jarvis, you have seen that thing?"

"Yes, sir. I initialed it and passed it on to the machine-gun officer, as directed."

"It affects you, of course."

"Yes, sir."

"Where are your lot dining to-morrow?"

"At the Estaminet du Moulin."

"That's the place at the corner, close to your lines?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good."

The thing to which the C. O. alluded was a synopsis of strictly confidential literature issued by the higher command a few hours ago. Brigades and battalions were warned that various indications suggested the possibility of the enemy's attempting something in the nature of a surprise to-morrow. It might be bombardment, gas, or direct assault; but the idea of the higher command was that the enemy would somehow try to take advantage of its being Christmas Day, and officers commanding battalions in support should therefore exercise vigilance and be ready for anything. Christmas is Christmas, but war is war.

Officers, speaking of this confidential matter while the children drank their tea and pulled their crackers, agreed that it was the sort of dirty trick the Germans would play if they *could* play it.

Two young platoon commanders were speaking of it now, as the padre distributed the last of his toys from the bran pie.

"It doesn't mean standing by, does it?"

"Oh, no, only to be ready to turn out."

And they went on talking. The child Antoinette was close to them; and at something that they said she turned sharply and watched their faces with large anxious eyes.

"Hallo, Antoinette! Do you understand English?"

"No, my Lieutenant, but one word — 'the *Germans*.' You said the word. What of the Germans?"

"We're only saying we're afraid they'll want to interfere with our Christmas dinner," and Lieutenant Thompson laughed.

"But is that possible?" Antoinette echoed the laugh; then she became grave and asked some solemn questions. "They can not come here, can they?"

"Not unless they make a hole in the line first."

"But they would be stopped by the other regiments?"

"Yes, unless the smell of our turkeys and sausages made them very fierce indeed. They might risk everything to get a share in the plum pudding."

"But you will guard against it?"

"Oh, yes, we'll try to guard against it."

Antoinette spoke very gravely. "You will want somebody to watch while you are at dinner."

"Thompson, don't be an ass," said the other officer. "You are frightening her."

"Not she. Are you afraid, Antoinette?"

"I am never afraid," she said firmly. "But believe me, the Germans want watching always."

At the end of the party the colonel, who talked all languages that a soldier ought to know, made a little speech in perfect French, saying how great had been the pleasure of the Tenth Battalion to see their kind friends there that afternoon; and the mayor, who, like all Frenchmen, knew only one language and never wished to learn another, responded with a few happy phrases of acknowledgment.

"Not only," said the mayor, "do we sleep tranquilly in our beds because you form a living and unyielding wall between us and the cursed enemy, but by your kindness and sympathy you have bound us to you as more than allies, as true friends;" and he added that they would have liked to sing *God Save the King*, had they been able to master either the tune or the words; but they would sing it silently, deep in all their hearts.

Then the colonel called for *The Marseillaise*. He told the quartermaster to sing it, and the

quartermaster said it was more in the padre's line, and the padre hurried out of the room.

"Shameful," said the colonel indignantly. "I'll sing it myself, if you fellows are such——"

But the cry arose, "Antoinette. Antoinette. She sings it ever. Antoinette!"

It was pretty to see the child's shy expostulations and graceful surrender. They put her at the top of the room facing the audience, and she raised her little voice and sang. The chorus nearly broke the schoolhouse windows; every one went mad with enthusiasm. When it was over they put Antoinette on the table where the toys had been, and made her sing it again.

It was wonderful and touching to see and to hear—the rather shabby, pathetic little figure perched high on the table, the small face flushed from the effort of singing, the eyes bright and large, the hand raised dramatically; and the thin but sweet little voice piping out the glorious song of unconquered and unconquerable France. All went mad for the second time.

This was the culmination of Antoinette's success. As one left the party one felt that it would have been nothing without her.

Outside in the village street night had fallen pitchy black; all lights were carefully screened,

and only a gleam showed here and there as a door opened and shut or somebody flashed his torch lamp; but well-practised eyes soon grew accustomed to the darkness. One heard the sound of horses' hoofs and moving wheels—and one guessed at once what this might be, before the sentry at the corner challenged. It was a limbered wagon and the mess cart, both heavily loaded with the Christmas mail—forty bags of it, for the battalion. They turned in by the archway to Madame Binet's courtyard, the quartermaster's stores; and soon the post corporal and his special assistants were going round the dark village with thousands of letters and cards from home.

"Halt. . . . Who goes there?" Another sentry challenged. "Pass, friend. All's well."

All's well. The spirit of Christmas was floating in the night air. At the snug, warm, officers' messes the talk was of home and of being there this time next year. Just before the meal was finished at headquarters mess a wagon stopped outside the windows and carol singers interrupted the conversation. They were musicians of the divisional band going round the villages in a G. S. wagon, stopping at important points, singing their carol, and passing on.

At Sainte Chose we flung open the windows and

stood with the night air blowing into the room while we listened.

"Is the band sergeant there? Come in, Sergeant, and have a glass of port wine."

"Thank you all the same, sir, but we must get on to Telvillers, to sing outside the brigade mess."

"Then good night. A happy Christmas to you all."

One felt that if the band sergeant could not wait for a glass of port he must really be in a hurry.

A few minutes before nine officers were going round billets to see that all was in order before lights out. On the gentle slope in the roadway at the top of the village one could hear distant rifle fire, an occasional rattle of the machine guns, or the solid booming of artillery; stars rose in the east, the pallid flares with which the enemy would light the sky all through the night; and one knew that over there, on the far side of the waste, thousands of men were watching and listening in the darkness; that little knots of men were creeping on hands and knees through gaps in the wire; that men were trying to blow one another to pieces with bombs, to shoot, stab, tear, to rend the life out of one another somehow in the darkness. But all that was normal, quite in order; from the

business point of view, it was a quiet, peaceful night. One turned from the roadway, went along a muddy lane, came to a barn, and opened the door. Twenty, thirty or forty men were lying wrapped in their blankets on the floor; and, fixed in improvised tin sconces, ends of candles burned cheerfully against the brick walls above the men's heads. By the candle-light they were looking at their Christmas cards and re-reading their letters from home.

"All present, sir," said the non-commissioned officer.

"Are you all right there?" asked the officer.

"Yes, thank you, sir," said the men. "All right, sir."

"Got enough straw?"

"Plenty, thank you, sir."

"Then lights out."

Next moment all was dark in the barn.

"A happy Christmas to you."

"Same to you, sir. Happy Christmas."

Out of the darkness their strong, brave, friendly voices came in a jolly chorus; and one went squashing through the mud to the roadway, thinking perhaps.

"Halt!"

It was the challenge of a sentry that one was not expecting.

"Who are you?"

"Officer commanding number six platoon."

"Advance and be recognized."

One went forward a few paces.

"Halt!" And there was a bayonet at one's breast.

"Flash your lamp so's I can see you."

One obeyed, and the bayonet was withdrawn.

"Pass, friend. All's well."

And one went on, perhaps thinking again. "Pass, friend. All's well." It was almost the very words—a message of peace and good-will to all men. The spirit of Christmas was in the air; one could not escape from it; one felt as if the village was two thousand years away from the war.

There was a fog next morning, but by midday it had lifted and a pale but friendly sunlight fell upon the white walls of the *mairie* and the busy little street. Church parade was over; duty men were cleaning themselves; dinners would be served at one o'clock, and half of the kind inhabitants had in one way or another lent a hand in getting things ready.

Truly the Tenth Battalion had done it in style, each company vying with another, and the results

surpassed belief. Unnumbered turkeys, obtained from England, had been cooked at the quartermaster's stores; sausages also, together with pork from Doullens; the whole regimental transport had been employed to move the beer from railhead; the day's ration beef would smoke upon the boards; and there had been a benevolent issue of plum pudding from a great London newspaper. Beyond this solid fare there were incalculable delicacies purchased by officers, and the outlay on decorations had been lavish.

The scene of yesterday's juvenile party was now D Company's banqueting hall. Tables had been laid out to seat the whole company; they creaked under the good things, they glittered with colored ornaments. When one came in at the door one had the genuine illusion—the stage was set for a true English Christmas dinner—one *was* in England. Burly sergeants marched up and down by the tables, counting the places, surveying the long perspectives of glass, cutlery and piled fruit dishes. Such potentates as company quartermaster sergeants stood proud and immovable, giving directions to subordinates busy with final touches. Quick-handed, neatly-dressed French girls bustled in and out, assisting, exactly as if they had been the sisters and cousins of the

battalion; and the non-commissioned officers spoke to them quite in this spirit: "Here, my lass, put those oranges down here. . . . What ye got there, Nellie? More nuts? Very good. Carry on."

The other companies, including headquarters, were as happily accommodated. Between twelve-thirty and one the colonel made a tour of inspection with his second-in-command. All this sort of unusual exertion, coming under the head of what is called domestic economy, naturally belonged to the second-in-command; and the major modestly explained it all as they went from point to point. When the men had finished their dinner and the wine had been put on the table, the colonel should come round again, look in at each dinner, and say a very few words. Then after his speech the men would probably drink his health, and quite possibly sing *He's a Jolly Good Fellow*. Then after they had smoked and drunk for some time, they would all go out, the rooms would be rearranged, and they would have informal sing-songs, and no doubt more speeches for the rest of the evening. Everybody would get his dinner comfortably; by a system of reliefs indispensable duty men would be given their turn; nothing had been forgotten. Really it was a

triumph of organization. But what about guards? Well, a special dinner for headquarters guard would be served in the main guard room. Other guards would be feasted by company arrangement.

"Upon my word," said the colonel genially, "you are top-hole at this sort of thing. Does you the greatest possible credit, my dear old boy."

At five minutes to one the men began to fill the street and all the open space at the cross-roads by the *mairie*. They looked splendid, so smart and clean; their faces shining from extra soap, their buttons glittering like jewelry, their boots so well blacked that they seemed to be made of patent leather. They stood about waiting, alert, soldierlike, and very quiet; although there were so many of them that their mingled voices made a pleasant music. Then, at a word, they began to file off to their respective rendezvous. D Company went up the steps of the schoolhouse, smartly saluting their colonel as they passed. In three minutes they had disappeared, and the street was empty. The colonel and headquarters officers still stood in a little group talking, and except for them there was not an English soldier in sight. For a moment, in accordance with the custom of the Tenth, they congratulated one another on belonging to such a battalion.

"*What* a battalion it is!" said the colonel; and the adjutant, the intelligence officer, the transport officer, the medical officer heartily agreed.

Indeed, you could not command such men without being proud of them and loving them. One could not think of them without tenderness; and one felt this now, as a tremendous noise inside the schoolhouse told one that D Company was sitting down to dinner. Poor chaps—one felt quite soft and sentimental as one thought of their having a good square meal in real comfort, a few hours' complete respite, a little gaiety to make them forget their ugly task.

"What's that?" said the colonel. "Listen!"

In the now silent street one heard the light patter of approaching footsteps, and next moment a child came running round the corner from the forked road. It was Antoinette. She ran to the colonel and stood breathless, panting, with a hand pressed to her side.

"Bless me," said the colonel, smiling, "you seem in a hurry to-day, Antoinette."

"My Colonel," she gasped. "The Germans! The Germans have broken through."

"What's that, Antoinette?"

"They are there," and she pointed with her little

hand in the direction of the line. "Not two kilometers from here."

"But how do you know that, Antoinette?"

"I have seen them myself."

"You have, have you?" The colonel was looking down at her, with a kindly but serious smile. The others had gathered close round her, and all watched her. "How came you up there, Antoinette? Were you alone?"

"Yes. I went there to watch for the battalion, because it is Christmas and you are all at dinner."

"How many Germans did you see?"

"Six or seven. I think it was the head of a column. They were in the sunk road, perhaps three hundred meters from the crossing that leads to La Sainte ruins."

"Did they see you?"

"No. As soon as I had seen them I ran to bring you the alarm."

"Thank you, Antoinette. You are a little angel."

These questions and answers took less than no time, and while listening one thought. It seemed incredible, and yet it must be true. You could not look at the child's face and doubt her sagacity or truthfulness. Except that she was out of breath, she was as calm and collected as the colonel him-

self. Indeed, from her businesslike manner she might have been another battalion commander or a staff officer quietly imparting a necessary piece of information. But, nevertheless, was she mistaken? No. *She had once been in the hands of the Germans.* She knew a German when she saw him. Then how could it have happened? The night and the morning had been profoundly quiet, scarcely any shooting at all, because of the fog. Yes, the fog? One thought of the small river and the ravines at the extreme left of the divisional front, the point of junction between us and the French division, the point covered by the guns of both divisions. Could they have possibly filtered through there in the fog? One thought very rapidly. But the colonel thought more rapidly than the others because he thought so methodically.

"Thank you, Antoinette." He shrugged his shoulders, and the brisk concise orders began to rattle out of him.

"Yes, sir . . . Yes, sir . . . Yes, sir . . . Yes, sir."

One after another his officers had gone. Immediately after the first officer vanished there came a shuffling of feet in the schoolroom. D Company was in the street, going to its billets.

The other companies were out; the whole village was full of hurrying soldiers. To the villagers these three or four minutes were like a fantastic dream. Clotilde, bringing the last plate of walnuts and meaning to hand it to a non-commissioned officer, found the crowded room empty. Louise, coming with another knife and fork, met a surging mob that said, "Excuse me, miss," and slipped past her. Madame Binet, with other good souls, pulling turkeys out of the ovens and looking round for help, saw the quartermaster's staff packing up the butchers' tools, carrying heavy boxes and dumping them in the archway. She went to the front door and looked down the road at Rosine's farm. Officers' horses, fully caparisoned, were coming out of the gate. The transport men were running about like ants; ammunition boxes were being handed out of a loft door and dropped into wagons; the machine-gun limbers went round the corner to Madame Boutroux's at a gallop. And it was the same everywhere all over the village. The inhabitants found themselves suddenly unnoticed, alone with all the food and crockery, in the midst of a quiet, preoccupied, busy crowd. The orderly room was packing up while it talked to the brigade on the telephone. The signals office was doing astounding things

with its wires. Then they heard tramp, tramp, tramp. People at the top of the village saw the bayonets flashing in the pale sunlight. It was a platoon of A Company marching up the slope. Tramp, tramp on the two other forward roads—a platoon of B Company, a platoon of C Company; each of the three platoons going to its appointed spot on its own road. And tramp, tramp, tramp at the *mairie* and the schoolhouse—the whole of D Company, under arms, formed up outside its empty dining-room, right-dressing, numbering, and all the rest of it. Already, some little while ago, as it seemed, the colonel, with his intelligence officer and an orderly, had been seen cantering out of the top of the village, by the crucifix and the fir trees. Following him in the same direction came signalers with flags and lamps. The puzzled villagers rubbed their eyes and looked at their clocks. It was four minutes past one.

There had been no noise, no confusion. Everything was of course cut and dried. The brigade had been informed, and no doubt was talking about it to all concerned. Those three platoons had now spread out and were lining the outskirts of the village, according to plan. The remainder of their companies were in billets quietly waiting. D Company was here at the disposal of the colonel.

Having said that the intelligence officer was to go out and reconnoiter and the second-in-command was to go, too, he changed his mind and went himself instead of the major. This was only because temperamentally he always wanted to do everything himself, and not because he took a gloomy view of the situation. While waiting for the horses he continued to discuss things with Antoinette, getting all information out of her. The Germans were not heading this way. No, they were working south, say two kilometers behind our front and parallel to it; that is, following the sunk road and the tracks toward La Sainte.

The colonel had gone, and things were dull in the village. The battalion was ready to move forward to the attack, to move sidewise as a reinforcement, to move any way but backward. Time passed slowly. D Company took off its equipment and sat down. One smoked one's pipe and waited for orders.

Out on the waste, where the colonel and the intelligence officer were cantering along a mud track, all seemed normal and peaceful. Straight ahead one saw leafless trees on the edge of ruins that had been villages like Sainte Chose, undula-

tions of ground with seams of white chalk running across them, roadways raised on embankments above the marshy flats—and all that was the line itself. Far away to the left there were higher ridges, hummocks with firs, and woods—and that was where the unseen river crept sluggishly through the ravines from the German position to ours. Every now and then one saw a puff of white smoke, and after a time one heard the sound of a gun. With lulls of silence, there was the usual meaningless rifle fire and the irritating tap-tap of machine guns. Our batteries lay dozing placidly; observation balloons hung with lazy lurches in the quiet atmosphere. For those who knew it, the scene could not have had an aspect more restful to the eye. Out here it was inconceivable that anything had gone wrong. The notion of a serious break-through was simply untenable. Of course on this dull, drab-toned heath there might be a considerable force of men, either in field-gray or khaki, without one's immediately spotting them; but the colonel did not expect that his reconnaissance would disclose the enemy in force.

"All moonshine, Richards," he said genially. "But what else can one do? War is war."

"You don't believe Antoinette saw them?"

"I don't know what to think. We'll see for ourselves."

They went first to the exact spot indicated by Antoinette; and between this and the village there had not been a sign of anything. They worked up to the spot from the left, and when they looked down into the sunk track there was nothing there. Then they rode slowly southward, keeping on top of the bank. At a point two or three hundred yards short of the main road they dismounted and gave their horses to the orderly, who followed slowly with the three horses. The sunk track went deep before it rose to the surface at the crossing over the main road; and the colonel and Richards, with their revolvers in their hands, crept very cautiously to the edge of the high bank. They had heard something, and they were both excited. Distinctly, unmistakably, men lay concealed down there — German men, talking gutturally in their own hateful language. Another moment, and they peeped over at them. There they were—Germans all right; seven of them; a non-commissioned officer with a red band to his cap and six privates; no helmets, no rifles, no nothing; recognizable at a glance as prisoners of war escaped from some neighboring camp or cage.

The colonel stood up, almost apoplectic with anger, and spoke to them in faultless German.

"You damned rascals, what do you think you are doing here?"

"Your excellency," and the N. C. O. raised his hand to his red cap in a most correct salute. "We left Alaincourt last evening, and have thought to get through the line before dawn. But it is light when we arrived here; so we have thought to wait and try to get through when it becomes dark."

"Oh, you have, have you?"

The anger of the colonel and the stolid politeness of the Germans rendered the interview a strange one. Their stolidity made the politeness as exasperating as impertinence. In the circumstances it *was* impertinence.

"Scramble up that bank, you blackguards—double quick."

"Yes, sir."

And cumbrously they climbed up to the high ground, and stood to attention while the colonel got upon his horse. On the road the foremost signaler with his flag had just arrived perspiring, and thus established communication with the village. The colonel sent a message saying everything was a wash-out. Then he put the prisoners in charge of the signaler and the orderly, who

looked at them as though they would torture them for a while and afterward slaughter them.

"Pardon, your excellency," said the German N. C. O. "You are doubtless sending us to your headquarters, but we have left Alaincourt yesterday without rations and are grievously hungry. Will your excellency give an order that we may be given some food before we are handed back to the military police?"

"No," said the colonel, almost bursting, "I'll see you damned first;" and he turned his horse and cantered away.

In the village it had been tramp, tramp, tramp. "Halt . . . Left . . . Right dress . . . Number one platoon. Dis-miss;" "D Company. Dis-miss;" and so on. Equipment was taken off or put away; billets emptied. The broken thread was picked up as best they could. Clotilde and Louise got to work again; Madame Binet and the others put the turkeys back in the ovens; company cooks recovered their joints of beef; the whole village lent a hand. And soon the word went round that dinners would be served at three P. M.

The men stood about waiting, and talking rather ominously. "What ab'aht these pris'ners—eh, old pal?" There was a strong feeling that now or never was the time for the Tenth Battalion to

begin killing their prisoners. The true tale of the alarm, too, was now known to all; and poor little Antoinette was anything but a popular favorite this afternoon. There was talk of deputations on Aunt Rosine, with petitions that a hair-brush might be applied to Antoinette.

But when the transport section came from their lines, they spoke up for Antoinette, and people listened to them. After all, they had suffered most—every animal harnessed, every wagon packed with its mobilization stores—and they really knew Antoinette. So gradually public opinion swung round; the officers defended her; she had upset everybody, but she *had* meant so well. One thought of her, such a pathetic little figure; so fearless and so faithful; going up there all alone in the fog—to guard the battalion from surprise. No two ways about it, Antoinette was the stuff heroines are made of.

And it was all quite all right by three P. M., when the battalion sat down to dinner. Nothing had been spoilt; everything tasted better for having been kept waiting so long. All was gaiety and laughter. At four-thirty the colonel went round the dinners, and he took Antoinette with him. At each dinner he made his little speech, the men chanted *He's a Jolly Good Fellow*, and

Antoinette sang *The Marseillaise*. And the cheering was loud enough to be heard in the German front trenches.

The colonel did not miss a single gathering. After leaving Antoinette, he remembered the special dinner for the main guard. But he only took a glance in there, and came away hurriedly.

Then he went to the orderly room, where he found the adjutant talking to the brigade.

"Sir, the brigade says the corps A.P.M. is on the line, and would you care to speak to him direct?"

"Yes, I would," said the colonel, springing fiercely at the telephone; and he told the assistant provost marshal at army corps headquarters exactly what he thought of him, in good old-fashioned English.

"I'm sure I'm very sorry," said the A.P.M. "I don't know how it happened."

"I'll tell you how it happened," said the colonel. "It happened through infernal carelessness—nothing else."

"Where are they now?" asked the A.P.M.

"In my guard-room."

"I'll send an escort for them."

"Yes, I should jolly well think you would."

Then they laughed and made it up over the wire.

"I say," said the A.P.M. "I hardly like to ask it. But of course they have had no food since yesterday. Could you let 'em have some biscuits, or something?"

"Well—as a matter of fact—it seems that my chaps have given them a share of their dinner."

"Oh, that wasn't necessary."

"I know it wasn't. It's very wrong. It made me very angry when I saw it. But it had gone so far that I didn't know how to stop it."

The A.P.M. was laughing at the other end of the wire.

"They haven't given them turkey and sausages and all that?"

"I'm afraid they have," said the colonel reluctantly. "What can one do? There's the British soldier all over—always a damned fool. The only possible excuse for my chaps is, I suppose they thought, in their addle-pated way, that after all, don't you know, Christmas is Christmas."

THE STRAIN OF IT

WHEN the war broke out he was spending his summer holiday at Eastbourne—a naturally attractive place rendered to him abnormally beautiful and romantic by the presence of Miss Kate Richardson.

Katie was stirred profoundly by the great upheaval. It seemed at once to change her into another girl. She cancelled the engagement to go on the motor 'bus to Pevensey Castle; she cared no more for tea and sweets at the Arcade; all she seemed to enjoy was standing in the crowd round the band of an evening, hearing *God Save the King*, *The Marseillaise* and the other national tunes.

"Hurrah! Hurrah!" she cheered shrilly with the crowd. "George"—and she gripped his arm convulsively—"go and ask the conductor to play the Belgian hymn again."

His instinctive shyness made him demur. "It'll look funny, me pushing right to the front, won't it—I mean, conspicuous? Besides, they've played it twice a'ready."

"Go on. I want it again," and she gave him an eager thrust, speaking to him as he slowly moved away. "They won't mind—nothing matters now. They'll understand."

He moved slowly, he thought rather slowly. He worked his way through the crowd as best he could, composing his apologetic little speech as he went; but by the time he reached the blazing circle of lights round the balustrade, somebody else had done the trick for him.

"By request," said the gallant, uniformed conductor: "*Encore une fois*," and, after a wave of his baton, the band struck into the glorious tune again.

"Thank you," said Miss Richardson, when George Hooper got back to her side.

"Well, as a matter of fact, somebody else——"

"Hush! I want to listen. This is the Russian one. Doesn't it go through and through you?"

She was all on wires, pressing his arm, throbbing, vibrating. When the Russian anthem ended she cheered, waved her handkerchief, tried to get on a chair and nearly fell.

"Hold up," said George. "That might have been a nasty accident."

Then the conductor made another announcement. "*Eh bien!* By request. *Pour la dernière*

fois." And the band played the Belgian thing once more.

When it ceased Katie went on anyhow, not a bit like what she used to be—really making herself conspicuous, if people had noticed her.

She was all right when the band had stopped for good, and you got her away from the crowd, down on the sands among the boats in the moonlight. George arranged her with her back to a large sailing-boat, and kissed her affectionately, as usual. She would let you kiss her just the same—only somehow it *wasn't* the same. Mysteriously, something had gone right out of it. She was limp and careless; her face was cold, and sometimes slightly wet with tears. Also she made abrupt, disconcerting movements, catching you on the bridge of the nose with the rim of her straw hat.

"Hark! What was that?" She had disengaged herself forcibly, and she held up her hand with a dramatic gesture.

It was a feeble echo of that Belgian thing, floating to them from the region of the Arcade—a faint music made by a harp and a piano.

"I'm thinking of the moonlight," said Katie. "It's the same out there—the Germans are marching through Belgium under the moonlight."

"Well, they haven't marched *through*, not yet."

"Who's going to stop them?"

"Well——"

"P'raps they'll be unkind to the inhabitants—innocent men and women who aren't fightin'. You never can tell." And she began to cry, clinging to him, asking him to hold her tight. "It's shaking me to pieces," she sobbed. "I—I'm only a poor weak girl. You're strong—you're a man. Tell me not to be silly. Hit me, if you like. But make me believe. Comfort me, George, by saying that we're going to smash them, and punish them, and drive them back."

And he comforted her to the very best of his ability.

"From all I read in the papers," he said earnestly, "you can rest assured a very complete punishment will soon be meted out to the aggressors in this war—perhaps a good deal sooner than what is expected, and very much to their surprise, too."

He himself had been stirred by the outbreak of war. He thought of the varied chances of life. Quite conceivably he might have been a soldier, instead of being a warehouse clerk. In that event, he, George Hooper, would now be going out to the war—or have gone already—in the ordinary way of business, taking it as a matter of course, thinking it just as natural to risk death in Flan-

ders as to write out an invoice in St. Paul's Churchyard. And he would have done that job just as efficiently, no doubt, as he was doing his own job. Why not? He was strong, powerfully built, every inch a man—as Katie had been good enough to say. Of course, to make a soldier, you have to catch him young. It's a trade, soldiering, to which you have to be apprenticed like any other trade, but there is no insurmountable difficulty about it. What makes it seem so wonderful and remote is merely the glamour of the unusual—and also the queer sort of emotional confusion produced in the mind by the blare of trumpets, the roll of drums, the singing of these national anthems, and the rest of it. And another thought confirmed his judgment. He thought of those Territorials. That there is no real mystery in a soldier's work has been proved by the fact that it is possible to acquire a smattering of it rapidly. If one had had the means, and could have afforded the time, one might have been a kind of sort of a soldier as a Territorial.

He was conscious of the glamour that appears to surround the commonest military matters—more especially in war time—as he stood watching some loaded artillery wagons pass through the main street on their way to the railway

station. Having nothing else to do, he followed them as far as the station yard. They belonged to the Territorial Force, somebody told him; and then almost immediately he recognized an old acquaintance in a driver who had just dismounted from his horse.

It was the bathing-machine man from Brown's machines over there on the sands; but really, dressed up like this in khaki, hung round with equipment, handling the horses so determinedly, he appeared something quite grand, instead of a humble, shambling person who gave you a pair of towels in exchange for twopence. George Hooper made sure it was no one else by speaking to him.

"Where are you bound for?"

"Canterbury."

"For long?"

"Can't say. Dessay it'll be some time before we get acrost."

Then a sergeant gave a loud-voiced order, and the bathing-machine man unhooked his horses and led them from the wagon. George would have liked to give him a parting tip, but no opportunity arose. In fact, next minute, a policeman, acting on the direction of an officer, turned George and all the other sight-seers out of the station yard.

Everything comes to an end. Soon now his pleasant holiday was over. On the last night he had a heart-to-heart talk with Miss Richardson, after the band program was finished. She herself was returning to London in a few days; so there was no painful sensation of bidding her a long adieu. She was in the mantle department of a West-End draper's, easily accessible.

"I shall call for you, Katie, at closing time on the Thursday, and see you home. As you know, I want to be presented to Mrs. Richardson."

"Yes, I suppose I shall have to go back to old Rudge and Bryce's again, worse luck," and she sighed.

"How d'you mean?"

"I'd like to go and be a Red Cross nurse."

"Never?"

"I would. But of course they wouldn't take me. That's reserved for the swells—girls with handles to their names, and all that. There was a photograph in the *Mirror* of one of our customers—Lady Edith Bramshaw—in the nurse's uniform. You never saw anything so fetching in your life."

"You'd look fetching, dressed however you were. But don't talk such wild ideas."

"Is it wild? George, I feel I must do *some*-

thing. I can't go on just the same. Oh, how I wish I was a man."

"I'm very glad you're not," said George gallantly.

"Are you? Oh, come on. I'm tired. I must get back to the lodgings."

"Stop a minute." The girl's abrupt, almost curt tone wounded him. This was his last night at Eastbourne. If there had come some misunderstanding between them, he would settle it then and there. He asked her to explain why she seemed to care less for him now than she cared a little while ago. "If I have offended you, say so right out."

She said, "No."

"Then what is it?"

"Oh, I suppose it's the war. I am upset by it."

"So am I. So is everybody. But I should have thought"—and his voice showed real feeling—"I should have thought, if ever a girl wanted the love and the affection of a man—to cheer her up—to sustain her—it would be in such upsetting times as these. You've said so, yourself."

"And so I do," said Katie, melting. "Yes, I do want you, George. I'm all on strings, if left by myself. Only——"

"Only let me know exactly how I stand," said

George, with firmness. "Are we regularly engaged or not?"

She did not answer.

"That's how I've understood things, Katie; and meant to tell your mother so. But I am not the sort that likes to feel himself drifting into a false position. Now, are we formally engaged to be married? Do you look at it in that light or not?"

"Yes, of course I do," said Katie. "Now let me go, please. It's late."

Within a week he saw his fiancée in London. He had been introduced to Mrs. Richardson, an extraordinarily genteel widow, and had spent the evening at her modest but comfortable little house near Clapham Common.

Now he was there again, sitting in the front parlor alone with Katie, and once more he had the feeling that things were not absolutely all right between them. She drew her hand away, she sprang up from the sofa, sat down again with a jerk; she was nervous, like a person with something on her mind. When taxed with it, she said she was merely excited by thoughts of the new English Army; and she explained that from the mantle department of Rudge and Bryce's she had seen more than a thousand of them march by with

a Guards band playing them along. She sprang up from the sofa, to describe it.

"They looked such splendid young fellows—with the sunlight on their faces as they stared up at us girls. We were waving our handkerchiefs like mad, and they kissed their hands to us."

"They aren't all of them so young, mind you," said George. "I have seen some precious old ones going into the recruiting office opposite our place in St. Paul's Churchyard."

"Shall I tell you what I call them?" said Katie, with an odd tone in her voice. "The old ones and the young ones?"

"Yes, what do you call them? Kitchener's Lads?"

"I call them *heroes*," said Katie, with intensity.

And in the same intense manner she went on to say explicitly that she had no use for any one but heroes just now.

George got up from the sofa, and he looked hard at her.

"Katie. There's something behind this—something I can't for the life of me understand. Katie!" And it seemed as if a sudden inspiration had come to him. "Do you mean that you think I ought to go to the war?"

"Yes, I do."

"You do?"

"Of course I do."

He enlisted next morning. Really and truly—incredible as it may seem—he had never once thought of doing so till now. He would, of course, have come to it in time, but he thought things out very slowly.

England awoke slowly—one knows that phrase; and never was so cruel a slander uttered. England awoke quickly enough; but the authorities told her to go on sleeping. And George Hooper was a typical Englishman in this, that he had always done exactly what he was told to do. His mother and father had made him a warehouse clerk, and told him to attend to business. The manager at the warehouse told him to come to business early and stick to business all day. On the outbreak of war the newspapers told him that business was to be carried on as usual. Even when that great leader, Lord Kitchener, issued his appeal for men to fight for England, there immediately appeared amendments or belittlements telling one that not many men were wanted, and only men who could be spared, certainly no men whose coming would dislocate business. Heavy leading articles warned one to do one's duty in that sphere of life to which it had pleased God to call one, and not from a self-

ish love of adventure rush to the colors. Thus it had never occurred to him for a moment that he, George Hooper, might with perfect propriety desert St. Paul's Churchyard and take an active part in that other tremendous business of beating the Germans.

He was a little dazzled or bewildered when Miss Richardson opened his eyes and let the light in upon him; but a few hours afterward he had got everything in its correct perspective. It seemed to him that from the very first he had been pining to go. He blessed her for telling him that he ought to go. She was a girl in a million. She was a wife worth winning, worth fighting for, worth dying for. He wrote to tell her so—from a camp at Colchester.

It was eighteen months later, a winter evening, when George Hooper, on his first leave from France, turned up unexpectedly at the little house near Clapham Common.

"Katie," he bellowed from the tiny hall, as soon as the maidservant had opened the door.

"George!" Miss Richardson uttered a little gasping cry, when she came out of the parlor and saw him.

He looked enormous in his military overcoat,

and when he took her in his arms and gave her a bearlike hug, she really screamed.

"George! You almost killed me."

He laughed, pulled off his big coat, and went with her to the sitting-room. He was indescribably changed from what he used to be. It was not only that he seemed so much taller and bigger, that he was so much more alive and alert, but in his eyes there was the look of people, who, like sailors, are accustomed to open spaces and distant horizons, and his voice had the unconsciously firm tone of men who have been in command of other men. For the moment he was noisy and exuberant, and he seemed to take everything for granted. It was nearly supper time, and he took it for granted that he was going to stay to supper.

Miss Richardson ran out of the room to tell her mother this.

"It's rather awkward," she whispered.

"Now," said George, when she returned, "let's have a good look at you."

She was ten times finer in attire than she used to be; also much grander, or more like a lady of fashion, in her manner. To one freshly arrived from trenches and muddy French villages, she appeared to be dressed as richly as a princess. George looked at her with smiling attention;

noticed the nicely waved hair of her head, her open-work stockings, the marvelous high-heeled, buckled shoes, her blue eyes, her little sharp nose, the restless mouth, the pearl earrings, the movement of her absurdly slender arms emerging from the delicate fabric of the loose sleeves. And, curiously enough, he had the same impression of surprise that had been made by everything he had seen since he jumped out of the leave train. He had expected to be struck by the great size of things—the immense height of the buildings, the width of the streets, the extent of the traffic—and, far from this happening, things seemed small to him, even insignificant when compared with the mental pictures of them that he had been carrying about with him in France. Katie in this small room seemed small.

But the room was very smart, with many new ornaments and decorations. He mentioned the decorations in complimentary terms to genteel Mrs. Richardson when she came in.

"Yes, we have brightened up the house a little;" and in the most genteel manner she gave him to understand that they could have done more brightening, had not feelings of good taste and delicacy with regard to the war precluded them from making further outlay. Probably, before

very long, they would be moving into a larger house in a better neighborhood.

"Oh, yes," said George heartily. "You've been going up in the world, of course. I understand that Katie is a terrific swell nowadays."

"She is head of the department," said Mrs. Richardson, with motherly pride. "Messrs. Rudge and Bryce have put her in sole charge."

"Splendid!"

"I can tell you it isn't child's play, George," said Katie, with animation. "We have expanded into two floors. We are fairly booming. Our turn-over last three months knocked all records into cocked hats. And not made out of munition girls' trade, mind you. Not much. Our customers are ten per cent. of 'em with handles to their names."

"They work her to death," said Mrs. Richardson. "The firm rely on her so. However——" And she gave a well-bred sigh, from which one might infer that the firm behaved all right in the matter of remuneration.

Then there was a ring at the bell, and the servant announced, "Mr. Fordham."

He was a thin young man of about thirty, dressed in civilian clothes.

"I hope I'm not late. But you must forgive me if I am."

"We know your time is not your own," said Mrs. Richardson. "Let me introduce—Mr. Hooper."

George had greatly embarrassed Katie by taking the diversion caused by the new arrival as an opportunity for putting his arm round her waist and giving her another squeeze. Mr. Fordham stared and raised his eyebrows.

"An old friend of the family?"

"Almost a member of the family," said George.

"Really?"

"This is George," said Miss Richardson hurriedly, as she set herself free, "of whom you have heard me speak so often."

"Yes?"

"How did you leave the regiment?" asked Mrs. Richardson politely, filling a gap in the conversation.

"Seven hundred strong—and all in the pink."

"That is pleasant to hear. But, Mr. Hooper, all said and done, this war is a weary, weary business."

"Yes, it seems to drag a bit sometimes—even out there."

"But then you do have distractions, excitement. You are not compelled to sit all day in a chair, staring at the fire, and asking yourself when it is going to end."

"No, they don't make us do that;" and George laughed good-humoredly.

Then supper was announced, and they went into the other room.

"By Jove," said George, when they had taken their seats at the table. "This is topping. If you knew what it means. England. A meal at Clapham—here. After what I have been seeing. Katie, I simply don't know where to begin. I've so much to tell you."

"Tell me, to begin: What's the meaning of those stripes on your arm?"

"Sergeant! I am a full corporal, but acting sergeant. The third stripe is only acting rank. Don't suppose I shall ever have to take it off, though."

"Oh! Then they haven't made you an officer yet?"

"Officer? No, I am quite contented, thank you. I have all the responsibility I want, as it is."

"Not ambitious, eh?" said Mr. Fordham.

"I should have thought," said Katie, "you'd be keen to see yourself in the Tom Brown belt."

"Sam," corrected Hooper.

"What say?"

"All right. Go on talking, my dear."

"On the whole," said Mr. Fordham, "I take it, the life is very jolly over there."

"Jolly? Oh, yes, you bet."

"So I have always imagined."

"Bertie," said Miss Richardson, "Mary is offering you some cold partridge."

"There are hot cutlets, Bertie," said Mrs. Richardson. "I know you ought to have something warm after your long day."

It was all very nice, but perhaps a shade too genteel for perfect comfort; and George wished that he could have had them to himself, without this stranger. He glanced at Mr. Fordham, and wished him at Jericho. Mr. Fordham seemed to make Katie nervous and fussy. Yet why? Mr. Fordham, like everything else, produced that strange impression of smallness and insignificance. He was beautifully dressed, of course, in his queer civilian clothes; with broad lapels to his jacket, a colored shirt, and a jeweled pin in his tie. George thought, good-humoredly, "Those were what we used to worry about—choosing them with care, spending our wages on them, thinking they made us nuts. Comic, simply

comic. And lots of chaps talked like this little fellow, drawling, and trying to look important, and flushing and stammering if you spoke short to them. Comic."

"Yes," said Mr. Fordham, picking up the thread of his talk, "that is what I have imagined. Out there you have hardships, of course. But you have also the stir and bustle, the goodfellowship, the *camaraderie*."

"Yes, we've all that."

"In a sense, it must be a great relief to get away from the wear and tear, the incessant interruptions, the *ennuies* of city life."

"Quite a change."

"Like every one else, I have often felt the immense attraction of it."

"You haven't thought of giving it a trial?" said George, none too tactfully. "I mean by joining up?"

"He can't be spared," said Miss Richardson hurriedly.

"No," said Mr. Fordham languidly. "I am one of those unfortunate persons who have been labeled by the powers that be as 'indispensable.'"

"He is in the Pamphlets Ministry," said Miss Richardson.

"Head of one of the biggest departments in

the Ministry," said Mrs. Richardson, in a confidential whisper. "They work him to death, because they lean on him so. Bertie, how many did you say you have under you?"

"A thousand. Or, to be absolutely precise, one thousand and seven."

"Full strength, eh?" said George.

"What say?"

"Bertie used to be at Rudge and Bryce's," said Miss Richardson, "in the old days. He was chief in hosiery."

"Yes, I had that honor."

"You taught me pretty near all I know, Bertie."

"The firm must miss you a lot," said George.

"They said some very nice things when they were good enough to release me to go to the Pamphlets; and I must confess it was a great wrench at first—the breaking off of old associations. But then the wider scope of government work began to appeal to me. I threw myself into the organizing part of it."

"And now you like pamphlets better than underwear?" said George abruptly.

Mr. Fordham flushed and stammered.

"I—ah—don't follow."

"All right. Carry on. You were saying?"

But Katie's eyes flashed, her thin little arms

moved restlessly, and she turned her shoulder to George. She seemed to think that he had been rude to the other guest.

The conversation went on; but it was all about home politics, the strange vagaries of home trade, the drift of home fashions, and George felt rather out of it. He ate heartily while the others talked; and when not eating, he glanced thoughtfully at Katie and Mr. Fordham.

"You're not going, Bertie?"

They had come to the oranges, and Mr. Fordham looked at his gold watch.

"Yes, I fear so. I am bound to look in at the office."

"Just what I said," whispered Mrs. Richardson.

"They work him to death."

"Have you got a car, Bertie?"

"No, not to-night."

"Then I'll send Mary for a taxi."

"No, I'll walk to the end of the street, and pick one up. Good night. A thousand thanks. So glad to have met you, Mr.—er—Hooper."

"Don't forget your scarf. It's bitterly cold." Katie had risen, and she went out into the hall with Mr. Fordham.

"Won't you pass through to the drawing-room?" said Mrs. Richardson. "I must ask you

to excuse me;" and when she heard the hall door close she left the room.

"Now for it," whispered Katie, in the hall.

"It had to come sooner or later," said Mrs. Richardson, going up-stairs.

"Well, young lady?" said George, rather grimly. He took her by the shoulders and seated her on the sofa, but he did not begin any more hugging.

"Well, George?"

"Now that Cuthbert has gone——"

"That's not his name," said Katie angrily. "His name is Herbert."

"Herbert then—Bertie. So Bertie is indispensable?"

"George, I warn you, if you think you can make things better by abusing him, you make the greatest mistake of your life."

"Who's abusing him? He said himself that he was indispensable. And he is, isn't he? I mean, to you, as well as to the State?"

Katie brought out a handkerchief and put it to her eyes.

"Well, my dear, all I have to say is, if that's the case, I think you've treated me pretty meanly."

"You've no right to say that—it's ungenerous, it's unmanly." She had jumped up from the sofa,

and she faced him, with her blue eyes flashing. "Whatever's happened, you brought it on yourself. You deserted me."

"Deserted you?"

"Well, you know you did. When I wanted you most—when I simply couldn't get on by myself—you threw me on my own devices. Oh, I don't say it was wrong to go." She was talking very rapidly, almost hysterically. "You thought it was your duty—the right thing to do—and the rest of it; and you went. That was all right for you. But how about me? No, George, if it comes to speaking of meanness, I—I think it would be pretty mean of you to reproach me."

And she suddenly sat down, hid her face, and sobbed hysterically.

"There, there," said George, patting her shoulder. "Don't cry. Don't make a fuss about it."

"But I can't help making a fuss. You're so horribly unkind to me. You don't know, you can't know what the strain of the war has been on us girls and women. It's unbearable. I've been on strings, if left alone a minute. I couldn't go on without support—without some one to cheer me up and keep me going. I've thrown myself into it—Heaven knows I've worked. And the

crushing responsibility! At night I dream that I'm carrying the whole of Rudge and Bryce's on my shoulders. They rely on me. Mother relied on me."

"I relied on you."

"And so you could have—if you'd stayed at home. I was lost without you. Then when I began to rely on Bertie—when I began to admire him—seeing how magnificently he was doing—seeming to carry the whole ministry on his shoulders——"

"Yes, yes. Don't go on. I understand."

"You do understand?"

"Yes. But what I wonder is why you didn't mention it in any of your letters."

"Because I was thinking of you, not of myself. I wanted to tell you, but then I thought you might be disappointed. And it would be easier if we just talked it out like this."

"I see."

"Perhaps, too, I was a bit afraid," and she gave another sob. "George, don't be hard on me. Remember, I'm only a poor, weak girl, after all."

As he walked away, down the insignificant little street, he said to himself: "A bit thick, that. I must say, a bit thick."

Then, as he walked briskly along, he fell to

thinking of vast spaces and far-off horizons, such as one would find in the colonies of Great Britain; and the simple yet big life that people led there. Then he thought of a nurse he knew at a casualty clearing station near the Arras road, a girl from Australia, with large dark eyes and firm white forearms. She had left home and comfort six thousand miles behind her, in order to tend the sick and wounded, under shell-fire sometimes. He thought of his talk with her in the lane by the poplar trees and the river.

And he heaved a sigh of relief, and walked still more briskly. He had no use for any one but heroines just now.

THE CHÂTEAU

THE château at Mariecourt was the typically charming French country house that modern French novelists have described so often; and, although in the war zone, it remained for a considerable time quite untouched by the ugly marks of war. Passing it in the early summer of 1915, one saw it just as it ought to be, still unaltered. The village lay at the bottom of a little hill; and near the troughs, where one halted on the march to water the horses, there were gates that disclosed an avenue of lime trees, an archway, courtyard of stables, the roofs of farm-buildings. This was the business or workaday entrance to the château. On the left, as one went up the hill, there was an immense buttressed wall, surmounted by stone balustrades that showed the levels of the château grounds high above the roadway; and French servants, men in livery and women in white caps, came to the balustrade and leaned over it, laughing and talking, as they looked down at the column of troops. At the top of the hill there were gates much more ornate than the others, of wrought iron, with coats of arms gilded and

painted in the proper heraldic colors. This was the entrance of honor; and, as one looked back, one had a rapid glimpse of the château itself and all its pleasant, prosperous, dignified Frenchness—a large, circular lawn surrounded by the smooth gravel drive; white walls, innumerable windows with green shutters and sun-blinds, high slate roof; lower-roofed wings, turrets, gilded vane; and a glass veranda or winter garden in front of the ground floor—a place full of palms and flowers, comfortable chairs and sofas, where the family sat in doubtful weather.

Perhaps, too, one caught sight of its owners, the Count and Countess of Beauregard—a dignified, white-haired old couple, with a lot of little children that they have brought to the gates to watch the English soldiers pass by. Seeing them thus, one could easily imagine all the rest. Their sons and even their grandsons are fighting for France, and more than ever has the château become the family home, the fortress of the race; to which are sent these children of the next generation, to which come the anxious daughters-in-law, where will be found the warriors themselves during their periods of leave. And the grand old heads of the house, although so white, so old, so frail, carry themselves with pride and courage in the midst of their country's agony,

taking care of the children and the mothers and the governesses and the servants and the farm people, maintaining a modest economical state, guarding and protecting everybody; always when things are darkest showing the greatest fortitude; making hope seem easy because they are so hopeful; never for a moment allowing the home atmosphere to be tainted with a doubt that the cause of France will triumph in the end.

Also, with a slight effort of imagination, one could mentally see the joyous, peaceful life of the place in the days before the abominable war began—say in the autumn, when a large house-party assembled for the opening of the shooting season. Every one of the forty bedrooms would be occupied by the family, the guests, and their servants; the stables would be full of saddle and harness horses; motor-cars—accepted but not liked by the old count—would come spinning out of the stable courtyard. The gentlemen, gorgeously dressed, would be banging away in the woods all the morning; the ladies, in marvelous sporting costumes, would drive out in carriages to meet them and see the trophies of slain game; they would probably all come back to the house for an immense luncheon, and only the hardiest of the young men would sally forth to burn more cartridges in the afternoon. But there would be

rides on horseback through the woods, along the river, and over the hills, in which the ladies would take part; much lawn tennis; much talk and laughter, and graceful, gracious compliments. At night, with all the electric lights blazing, the château would seem at its very best, and doubtless the ladies looked lovely in their Parisian frocks; after the tremendous dinner, couples would be seen walking through the moonlit grounds, standing by the balustrades, carrying on graceful little flirtations; other couples would play *écarté* and *piquet* in the winter garden; other couples would dance in the big ballroom; the old count would be extraordinarily courteous and attentive to men and women alike, telling them perhaps a few stories that they had heard before about the war of 1870; the old countess, with her favorite daughter-in-law, would go up-stairs after dinner to see the dear children safe asleep in their cots; and when it came to say good night at the end of the evening there would be a great deal of kissing. It would all be much more intimate and domestic than a smart house-party in England; nearly all of it the family, and the other guests such old-established friends that everybody had forgotten they were not really relatives.

It was in the summer of 1915 that general

officers of the British Army began to be billeted at the château. Troops were always passing up the hill; the khaki flood was rolling into this part of France; and generals commanding divisions dropped in for a day or two with their aides-de-camp, and were given the best spare bedrooms and taken into the bosom of the family. The count ordered up from the cellar his choicest claret; he was absolutely charming in the welcome he gave to these red-hatted guests, and there used to be contests of politeness about the dinner hour.

"My General, what time will it suit you to dine to-night?"

"Whatever time suits *you*, my dear Count. If I *should* be a few minutes late, I know you and madame will forgive me. And of course you will not dream of waiting for us."

"Oh, but indeed, we shall wait for you, my General. We shall excuse you also;" and the count had a superbly benevolent gesture with his gouty right hand. "This is war. I myself have made the war of 1870 with the rest—and I well remember that while campaigning one is not one's own master. Nevertheless, to live one must eat. Therefore at your leisure you will decide what hour will suit you for dinner, and then you will let us know."

"You really are too kind. Shall we say eighty-three then? If you are sure it's all the same to you."

The old count had winced on hearing the lateness of the hour, but he pulled himself together, bowed, and smiled.

"Half past eight! Delightful. Be it so, my General. And you are to understand that in all things while you stay here——"

"Oh, I shall be off again to-morrow."

"So much the worse for us. We lose a pleasure. But as long as you stay, you will understand, I beg, that the house is yours, not mine."

The khaki flood continued to roll in, in bigger and bigger waves. Generals arriving for billets brought more and more staff officers with them, and required more and more accommodation. They took the salon for their mess-room, and the custom of dining with the family was abandoned; then they took the drawing-room, dancing-room, library for their offices, and the family, pushed out of the ground floor altogether, narrowed their life as much as possible and hid it on the first floor.

The old count was as charming as ever, not uttering the slightest complaint, still acting the kindly host if he chanced to meet staff officers on the stairs.

"Monsieur is the aide-de-camp? I hope your general is well here. If we can do anything to render his visit agreeable, you will tell me, will you not?"

"Ah, monsieur is the aide-de-camp who acts as camp commandant? Very good indeed. Spare me one minute of your time;" and he led the young officer through the kitchen—a lofty noble room—past sculleries and pantries, into a very small, walled garden at the back of the house. "It is nearer, this way. Now see. This is my wife's little private retreat, but she has thought your general might like the use of it. You see, it is just under the windows of his room. He has that private door there, opening upon the terrace. He can come in here at any time with his papers, and be quiet and happy—or have his coffee brought here after luncheon."

"Thanks awfully."

It was a jolly little place, with its high walls, roses, creepers, mown grass, and in the middle of it a tiny square fish-pond, with a marble pedestal rising from the water lilies and a poised cupid on top.

"Yes, ripping," said the A.D.C. "Now, sir, I am ashamed to ask—crowding you up like this; but our artillery general and his intelligence

officer are coming this afternoon. *Could* you let us have two more bedrooms? As a great favor?"

The count winced and pulled himself together. "From the moment you ask it, the thing is done. I will speak to my wife." Then he smiled benevolently. "And in exchange, you shall do me a favor, too. All those horses standing in the orchards. Can you tell your men so to attach them that they will not eat the bark of the fruit-trees? I must explain why I appear so troublesome"—and he supplemented his explanation with gestures. "Experience tells that when the bark of a fruit-tree is stripped off in a circle, the tree perishes. You forgive my importunity?"

"Oh, rather. I'll see to it at once. They know jolly well it's strictly against orders. I'll go and drop on 'em like a thousand of bricks. They have been warned again and again."

"You are always so considerate."

But it was no good. Two more bedrooms, three more bedrooms—nothing sufficed. The countess had put the children in the attics and the servants in the lofts; but the French authorities wrote to the count saying that the English Army had definitely taken over the whole of this zone, and that room positively must be found for them. Then the count with his entire family and house-

hold disappeared, leaving behind them only a man and wife as caretakers.

"Gone to Paris," said the woman, sitting in the kitchen. She answered curtly, and did not trouble to rise when officers entered. "What do you want? I speak for the countess henceforth. And my husband there speaks for the count."

"That is true," said the man, none too civilly.

"Oh, I see. I wanted to borrow a toast-rack."

"Such an article is not available—as a loan."

The château had passed into another phase now. It was a regular divisional headquarters, used by divisions in reserve, and a jolly good one at that. When you passed by in 1916 you saw at once that it was completely organized. By night it announced itself with colored lamps. By day the flag told you. Nearly all the paint and gold of the heraldic coats had peeled off the gate, and the iron had gone rusty; but there was a drab-toned sentry box and a smart sentry, who clicked his heels and presented arms as cars dashed in and out. The circular piece of grass was built over with huts. The winter garden was full of busy clerks; wooden tables ran from end to end of it, not a palm or flower-pot remained. The drawing-room was labeled "G Office," the library, "G.C.O.," the ballroom "A. & Q." A lorry

working the electric light throbbed and shook near the archway by the stable yard; the signals office was just inside the archway; and telephone wires were liberally festooned across the façade of the house. The dairy belonged to the military police, with guard-room and so forth. All those huts in front were offices with labels—officer in charge of the Royal Engineers, officer in charge of A.S.C.—artillery, chaplain, French mission, A.P.M., what not—an inextricable jumble to the untutored, but all in apple-pie order if you had the key to the puzzle. There were wagons in the grassless orchards, and horses stood tail to tail all down the back avenue. Every loft up here and in the village was a sleeping place for troops. Principal officers slept at the château, and juniors in cottages and huts. And wherever you turned your eyes, you saw activity and movement—the motor-cars buzzing, saddle horses being led about, red-hatted officers jogging at the double, orderlies swarming, fatigue men sweeping the gravel or cleaning the windows. The whole place was alive with this different sort of life; all very clean, well kept in its peculiar way, army-like, British.

Then in the winter after the fighting on the Ancre, when the Germans had been pushed back and the line had shifted a little farther away, the

château passed into still another phase. The neighborhood became what is called a staging area. Divisions moved through it incessantly; tired divisions going up north, rested divisions coming south, new divisions just arrived from England. Of a morning all the wagons, lorries, cars, horses, red hats and troops would roll away from the château; and in the afternoon or evening they all came rolling back again. Only it was not they really; it was another lot, just the same. General after general slept in the room over the little garden, rarely more than a night at a time, till all the divisional commanders in France seemed to have been through again and again. And the château showed the wear and tear of it; the strain and fatigue of entertaining these hurrying guests told on it heavily. From without it looked shabby and forlorn. Inside, the wall-paper was peeling, the cornices were tumbling, panels of doors were broken and their handles missing; the balusters on the stairs had fallen out; the top floor and the attics were almost knocked to pieces.

It should be noted that all damage was paid for twice or thrice. The extraordinarily high rates allowed for billeting by the English in France mounted to a formidable sum as rent paid for the use of the château. A French *liaison* officer and

five or six subordinates traveled with every divisional headquarters; and these made out billeting certificates, completed all formalities with the mayor of the village, and were careful that not a horse stood in the stable, not a man slept on the floor without handsome payment.

It should be noted also that the Count and Countess of Beauregard in truth had such fine and patriotic feelings that they hated this billet money, and would have preferred not to take a sou of it. On leaving their château, they had given orders to the caretakers that everything possible was to be done for the English Army; any fruit that ripened should be given to the general's mess, vegetables too, and wood for the fires; and, above all, the little garden was to be kept neat and tidy for the enjoyment of generals.

But Monsieur and Madame Sellier, like bad servants, released from supervision and control, obeyed none of their kind master's orders. On the contrary, they exploited the situation to the uttermost. They sold the garden produce to the guests at exorbitant prices; they cadged for tips; they extracted a noble revenue for the use of the mess-room and the kitchen. The British Government does not allow any billeting money for officers' messes; but as officers fighting in France

find they can not do without a place to eat their food in, they pay for it themselves. It would have broken the heart of the old count to charge extra rent for this accommodation; so his caretakers could safely put it into their own pockets, and they did so.

As time passed they grew more impudent. The man exchanged logs of wood with the cooks for bully beef, Machonochie's rations, and tins of tobacco. He levied tribute in the stables for use of ladders. The woman took the countess's bedroom for her own, putting a reserved notice on that and other doors. She reserved for her own use the little garden with the basin and cupid, hung up clothes lines for her washing, and could be heard there under the windows screaming at her husband. They charged now five francs a day for the dining-room and three francs for the kitchen. And they wished that the war would go on forever.

"See," said the husband, after everybody had cleared out of a morning. "They have left this behind. It isn't worth mentioning, is it? They can't want it."

"No. Put it in there;" and she pointed to one of her cupboards.

The man had a special cupboard of his own; and

into that he put the little finds or leavings that appealed specially to his own almost insane form of acquisitiveness. He had been a gamekeeper in the woods once, and everything connected with shooting fascinated him. He handled the men's rifles, looked at their ammunition pouches, and watched the servants cleaning their officers' revolvers. He was not quite so bad as madame.

Once when a harassed camp commandant arrived with his people, they found that madame had locked up the dining-room and was sitting on guard in the kitchen. She said she had withdrawn the privilege of using these rooms altogether.

"Then where is my general to have his meals? Where are we to cook for him?"

The woman shrugged her shoulders and spoke with drawling insolence. "It is a conundrum for which I am not called on to provide an answer. That is your affair, not mine."

"But, oh, I say. Really, you know," said the poor young officer.

Madame laid her hand, with a firm gesture, on the dresser by which she was seated.

"One's patience and good nature become exhausted," she said firmly. "This invasion has continued too long. I have said to my husband,

when the officer made trouble yesterday about payment for the privilege: 'I'll have no more of it.'"

"Yes," said the husband, "Madame has said so."

The camp commandant was in a hideous dilemma. The men were waiting to get to work with the mess boxes and prepare tea. The general was due in an hour; and he liked to find his mess-room all comfortable, the tea nicely laid out, everything reminding him of home. If this did not happen, he was apt to think he had got an ass for a camp commandant; and if hard pushed, he would say so in the presence of witnesses. Of course the camp commandant agreed to anything, however iniquitous. After some bargaining madame unlocked the mess-room, and let the soldiers enter her kitchen. She ordered the soldiers about as though they had been her servants; but, the rent being now fixed to her satisfaction, she became affable enough to the officer.

She was a woman of thirty-five, not ill-favored, with large dark eyes, a neatly dressed mop of greasy black hair and a sallow complexion. When she smiled and assumed a pleasant, friendly manner, as she was doing now, she showed large, white, even teeth; and her voice, which rose to a scream in moments of anger, grew soft and musical as the voices of other French women.

"Now that our little difference has been settled amicably," she said, smiling, "I can sell you a dish of pears for your general, if you wish. My pears are beauties. I am proud of my pears."

Then the French *liaison* officer arrived. He looked very smart and trim in his pretty uniform, with the blue band on his arm and the velvet and gold on his cap. When he heard what had been arranged he was indignant, telling the camp commandant he had done wrong, and roundly rebuking the woman.

"What is it to do with you?" said madame, raising her voice. "Mix yourself with your own affairs. This gentleman and I have settled the matter. At a glance I have seen that he was a gentleman, and therefore I consented to treat with him. *You* I utterly defy."

If she could be insolent to officers of the Allied forces, her insolence to officers of her own army was infinitely greater.

"You can not keep us out of this kitchen," cried the Captain Aubry. "We have the right of access to the family cooking fire. It is the law of France."

"I maintain no family fire here," yelled Madame Sellier. "If there is no fire, the right falls to the ground. So much for your law."

"That is what we shall see. I go now, on the instant, to the mayor, to make requisition in form. I telephone, I telegraph, and I return here under brief delay with the *gendarmes*."

"I mock myself of you and the mayor, too," screamed Madame Sellier.

The camp commandant drew the *liaison* officer aside. He said they were moving on to-morrow; it did not matter. Moreover, the English authorities disapproved of requisitions; they wished the army to respect the susceptibilities of the French population, to keep on good terms with them, to do everything in a friendly way.

"Quiet her somehow, old chap. If she goes on making this noise the general will have a fit." And the camp commandant hurried off. He had plenty of other matters demanding attention.

"It is the principle I fight for," said Captain Aubry; and, left alone, he and madame had a tremendous nagging match. Before it was over he had worked himself into the state of furious excitement that Frenchmen only reach when feelings of patriotism mingle with their other emotions.

"You make me blush for you."

"Blush for yourself. You speak so to a lady?"

"I look round in all directions, but I see no lady,

here. I see a personage who forgets her duty to the glorious land of her birth."

"That land and all its joys and comforts have been spoilt by these English, who march through our kitchens and homes night and day. It is an intolerable invasion."

"Oh!" And Captain Aubry almost burst. "You dare to permit yourself to use such a word! It is unworthy of a French woman. These are our friends, and you call them invaders. Suppose it was the enemy in their place?"

"I don't know that it would be worse," said madame.

"Oh!" With gestures and words of horror, fury and disgust, Captain Aubry rushed from the kitchen.

He was absolutely calm again by dinner time, peeling a pear with his special silver pocket-knife, and shrugging his shoulders as he spoke of the affair.

"The woman is low class—not a typical example—without heart, and probably without moral virtue either. The mayor tells me that there is suspicion against the man for a thief. There has been a plaint lodged at one time by a certain division, concerning the loss of a revolver in this house; but the mayor has forgot the numeral of the division."

These caretakers gave the château a bad name. Camp commandants, speaking to their "opposite numbers," passed the warning up and down France.

"If you go to Mariecourt, it's a topping château," said one, "but they'll do you in the eye if they can."

"It belongs to an old pincher in Paris," said another; "and he's on the make all the time. He does it through two stewards, who simply skin you alive. And they're so damned rude about it, too."

Every division had some tale about the harpy count and his odious representatives. Really they were the only two objectionable French people that one ever met in France.

So things went on, always the same, until the spring of 1918, and the German advance.

Then for two days English troops were marching by without stopping. They passed down the road beneath the great buttressed wall and the stone balustrades, in an endless stream, artillery, engineers, infantry; and the roar of the guns seemed to draw nearer and nearer. The château stood empty. There had been some confusion in the village when all the military lorries came to

fetch away the inhabitants. People brought out their horses and harnessed them to every farm-wagon and cart, piling up their furniture, bedding, chickens, and children. The mayor ran in at the front entrance of the château to ask if the Selliers were going with the convoy. He said the authorities had proclaimed danger in delaying. The battle was not prosperous.

"Are you going yourself?" asked madame.

"No, I stay," he said proudly; "because I am the mayor. I stay, whatever happens."

"And I stay, because I am Madame Sellier," she replied obstinately. "Nothing will happen."

The mayor trotted away.

"Thérèse," said Sellier, biting his fingers and looking in the direction from which came all the noise, "I ask myself if we are wise."

Just then a shell burst with an appalling crash among the huts on the circular lawn, and the Selliers ran cowering back into the château.

There were good solid cellars, with vaulted roofs, and they spent most of the day down there, under an intermittent bombardment. Once or twice a gigantic explosion made them think that the château was tumbling about their ears; the whole fabric seemed to totter. The rattle of rifle fire and machine-gun fire never stopped; it ap-

peared to be all round them; they fancied, too, that they heard shouting. But late in the afternoon all the noise moved farther off; and then there fell complete silence. Monsieur and madame came up from the cellar, crept into the garden, gazed, and listened. They saw huge shell-holes on the terrace and the lower lawns, but the château was untouched. And in the queer silence after all the racket, they heard the footsteps of troops still marching by. They looked down into the roadway, and drew back terrified. *Germans!*

Five minutes afterward there were German officers in the front hall, and a divisional headquarters came rolling in.

It was exactly the same—only Germans. Signalers, orderlies, clerks, and all the rest of it. These men in gray, with their ugly helmets and large boots, took possession of the kitchen. They brought in their heavy, metal-clamped mess boxes, dumped them, and grunted. The officers in their long overcoats passed to and fro. They talked French better, but, if possible, with a worse accent than the English.

The Selliers cringed to these newcomers, and yet madame had the temerity to ask for payment of some sort.

"Silence yourself!" whispered her husband.

The Germans laughed.

Madame exhibited her white teeth in a forced smile. "I am sure," she said, "that you will show us consideration."

"Oh, yes. If you behave yourself you have nothing to fear. If you play the fool you will be shot."

A bullet-headed elderly officer was obviously the camp commandant—but, oh, so different from the silly-billies of the past. Not a gentleman, one saw at a glance.

"Get that fire going," he said to the husband; and Sellier went on his knees at the range, and hastily set to work.

"Much wood will be wanted—or coal, if you have it—for the rooms. Show these men where it is."

Sellier conducted them, and presently the soldiers came tramping back with immense logs.

Then the camp commandant said, "Now, my woman, your larder. Show me."

"My larder?"

"Yes. You have heard."

And reluctantly she opened her cupboards.

The officer and his sergeant examined the stores and a private soldier brought out all the eatables, fresh or preserved, and stacked them on the

dresser. They reminded madame of custom-house officials that she had met with once years ago.

"Have you nothing else to declare?"

They used the very words.

"No papers left by the English?"

"Oh, no."

"No arms, no maps, no secret hidings?"

"No."

"What is there?" and he pointed to a closed cupboard.

"That is my husband's—only odds and ends."

"Yes," said the man. He was fanning the fire that he had kindled in the range; and he got up from his knees, looking anxious.

"Open it. Well, have you anything to declare?"

The man twisted his hands. It was his little magpie hoard, the treasure in which he delighted.

"Oh, no, sir. All private property."

"Then why do you hesitate to open it?"

"I have not the key."

The camp commandant made a sign to two of the men, who were carrying a vast log. They advanced methodically, balanced the log and swung it against the cupboard door. When they had smashed the door they laid down the log and opened up the place, disclosing all that it contained.

There was every kind of rubbish; and on an upper shelf five service rifles, a revolver, two leather bandoliers and a lot of ammunition.

"Ach! Good. That is very good. Now what have you to say?"

"I will confess the truth." And the wretched man told the absolute truth; saying how, foolishly and wrongly, he had stolen the things from the careless English and stored them there out of sight.

"Yes, you have stored them against such a day as this. You are not a soldier; but you have thought, 'With these and the assistance of villagers whom I will admit during the night, as arranged, I will murder the German general in his bed, and thus rid France of one enemy. . . . Sergeant, make out your sheet.'"

The sergeant had seated himself at the kitchen table. He produced a stylographic pen, some ruled paper with printed headings; and he solemnly asked his questions. Names in full, age, profession, and so on.

"Thérèse Hortense Sellier. Age thirty-six. Wife of César Léon——"

The names bothered him.

"Make them write them themselves," said the camp commandant. And the terror-stricken pair

were made to write their names, write them in capital letters.

"Search them."

And this was done.

Madame was forced to help in cooking the dinner, and her husband in washing the vessels; and after dinner, about ten o'clock, they were both taken through the stable yard to the dairy, which was now being used as an office, and brought before another officer. The mayor and three or four trembling villagers were there.

The officer asked the mayor about these two.

But it was all unintelligible to monsieur and madame—all vague and confused as a nightmare dream. Something was said about making an example. If people behaved themselves, they had nothing to fear. If they played the fool, an example must be made of them.

In the morning, very early, one heard her screaming in the little reserved garden under the general's windows. It did not disturb the German general. He had heard the sound of women's screams so often that he could sleep through it quite comfortably nowadays. They were binding madame, because she struggled; and as she would not stand up, they tied her to one of the staples

that she herself had fixed to the wall for her clothes line. The man stood by her side, unbound.

The statue of the cupid was in the way; and at an order of the officer two of the firing-party put down their rifles, went to the basin and pushed the little statue off its pedestal. It fell with a splash, and the water went high into the air.

"Now is that all right? Have you a clear field of fire?"

And the non-commissioned officer said yes. It was all right now.

"Load!" and the soldiers put the cartridges into the magazines of their rifles.

"Assassins!" shrieked the bound woman. "You can not do it. Oh, say this is a cruel joke. Let me loose, and I will laugh and forgive you." She was half mad. "Assassins! You dare not! The English will punish you. I warn you, they will make——"

"Ready," said the officer. "Present!"

The man's face was white, the features distorted, and the mean mouth twitching. He knew it was hopeless. He made no appeal for mercy; and as the soldiers lifted their rifles some old instinct stirred in him, so that he raised a husky shout: "*Vive la France!*"

"Two rounds. Fire!"

The report of the rifles made as much noise in this confined space as a shell bursting. And as the smoke floated away, one saw the man lying at the foot of the wall and the woman still erect, her head fallen forward from the shoulders, her face hidden, her black hair like a mop, greasily lustrous in the faint sunshine.

THE WOMAN'S PORTION

THE long summer's day was drawing to a close. Dusk crept into the room, hiding some of its ugliness and filling its blank spaces with gray shadow, while Lizzie Wade moved to and fro and tidied up for the night. The most important task of the evening was accomplished—she had put her baby to bed in his commodious cradle; and she murmured to him cajolingly as she straightened out materials on the work-table, closed the work-box, and restored the tea-things to their proper place in the cupboard.

"Mother isn't gone, darling. Mother has got the newspaper—so she won't have to run and get it—and leave you alone, you angel. Go to sleep. Hush-a-by, baby . . . Oh, drat those children."

Mrs. Wade's room was on the second floor of a London tenement house, a populous but respectable and well-behaved house, where one might expect quiet and consideration from neighbors who are aware that babies must not be kept awake after nine P. M. The older children of the house, however, had been playing at soldiers down below

in the small courtyard, drilling with paper hats and wooden swords. No harm in that; but now commanding officers from every floor had withdrawn all troops from this training area, and were bringing them back to billets. They made a terrible clatter on the stone staircase and Master Wade highly resented the disturbance. In a moment he was wide awake and squalling.

It took poor Lizzie a long time and many blandishments to resettle him. "There," she whispered coaxingly. "Be good—mummy's so tired." After the success of her efforts, she had seated herself again by the cradle, and she was rocking it while she looked at the evening paper, and strained her nice blue eyes in the gathering darkness.

"Go to sleep—go to sleep, my darling, an' dream of dear, brave father far away fighting for his country." Then for an instant, forgetting to whisper soothingly, she stared straight in front of her and spoke with sudden intensity. "Dream the war's over and father is coming home."

Father's son stirred uneasily, and uttered a fretful sound.

"There—there—there," she whispered. "Go to sleep and le' me read the paper. Oh, I suppose you want the paper read out to you as usual"—and she recited a few scraps of information in slow

and droning tones. . . . " 'Spite of repeated counter-attacks, all positions captured yesterday remained in our hands.' . . . Yes, captured by daddy and the dear lads."

Presently she rose and looked into the cradle. He was "off." The child had this great merit: once fairly asleep, he slept solidly. He took after his father in that. She went to the work-table, lit and regulated the oil lamp. The room was better by lamplight than by daylight—one could not see the patches on the screen that concealed the bed, or the blistered paint on the common deal cupboard, or the smoke stains on the plaster ceiling. In the lamplight, too, young Mrs. Wade looked still younger, less care-worn, almost pretty, with darker-colored eyes and hair, and some added refinement of curves and modeling about her chin and lips.

"Bother!" Somebody at the door.

"Good evenin'."

A neighbor had come in for a few moments' chat.

"Good evening, Mrs. Jones."

Mrs. Jones was middle-aged, a big jolly sort of woman, with habitual fondness of jokes and occasional lapses to lugubriousness.

"How's young two-and-six?" she asked politely.

"Don't wake him," said Mrs. Wade. "He's only just off."

"May I 'ave a peep at him?" and in a knowledgeable, matronly fashion Mrs. Jones investigated the cradle.

"To think," said Lizzie Wade, "that his father has never seen him—wouldn't recognize his own child."

"Never mind," said Mrs. Jones, with jovial playfulness, "so long as he really is his own child."

"Oh, he's *his* all right," and Mrs. Wade laughed, and tossed her head.

Mrs. Jones sighed. "Well, I've much to be thankful for. I thank Providence that Mr. Jones was too old for it, and could keep outside these dreadful times. Not but what he does his bit—in a way."

"What way?"

"Knocks off work Wednesday afternoon as well as Saturday."

"Oh," said Lizzie blankly.

"Holds himself free for any service he might be called on."

"Ah, yes," said Lizzie sympathetically. "And is he ever called on?"

"Not that I know of. It's very inconvenient

for me. But lor' "—and Mrs. Jones became quite cheerful again—"what's the use of grumbling? The inconvenience those inhuman fiends have caused everybody! D'you think we're goin' to beat 'em in the end?"

"Of course we are—that is, if we've enough men like my husband."

"My word, you *are* proud of him."

"And haven't I the right?" said Lizzie. "It's my pride in him that sustains me. He was among the first to volunteer. He's a full corporal already." There was something really fine in her aspect as she spoke thus enthusiastically. She held herself erect; her eyes, her whole face, shone. She went on eagerly. "Corporal—B Company! Perhaps you don't know the ranks? He was made lance-corporal first—then they raised him. Above that is sergeant."

"Where does the colonel come in?"

"Oh, he's over them all. I believe the colonel thinks highly of Jim—they all do."

"I'm sure they do," said Mrs. Jones cordially, "an' you're to be congrat'lated on him. How was he when he last wrote?"

"In the pink. Those were his own words."

"Ah, they all say it's a healthy life—in a sense.

Not in others, of course," and Mrs. Jones laughed. "What part did he write from?"

"They mayn't say where. But it was a part they'd just re-conquered. I'll read what he said. Shall I?"

Mrs. Jones courteously repressed an inclination to yawn. "Cert'nly. By all means."

"Here it is," said Lizzie Wade eagerly. She had brought the letter from her work-box, where it lay treasured more than needles and thread. "I tell you your blood will boil. This is the bit," and she read aloud. "'When we took the village there were only a few old men and women left in it. Ten days before, the rest were marched off by Germans. They paraded all the girls over thirteen and the women under thirty-five in one company in the street, and marched them away separate. They passed their mothers and relations in the open street, and the German soldiers were hitting them with their fists and the butts of their rifles when they tried to get one last kiss and hug.' . . . There! What do you say to that?"

Mrs. Jones said: "Well, upon my word. What next?" And both women sat for a few moments silent, thinking of the significance and the infamy of the episode that Corporal Wade described.

Then his wife went on reading the letter. "You bet it makes our lads half mad. I feel myself if I had twenty lives, I'd give them to punish such cruel hounds.'"

Mrs. Jones heaved another sigh. "Yes, and he'll want twenty lives before he has done."

"What do you mean?" asked Lizzie, putting away the letter with fingers that shook a little.

"Well, I mean—the—the danger. He's bound to take risks. Sooner it's over fewer risks."

"Oh, why do you say that—to frighten me with what I'm always thinking myself?" Her lips trembled, her eyes filled with tears, and in piteous tones she confessed how greatly she longed for her husband's society, how intolerable life seemed without him.

"Oh, don't take on," said Mrs. Jones.

"I can't help it. It's you—you've started me"—and Lizzie stretched her arms across the table, buried her face on them, and wept bitterly. "The war is too long," she moaned. "It isn't fair that the same men should be kept fighting. The strain is more than women can bear. I want him back. Oh, I want him back."

"Ush!" said Mrs. Jones. "We ain't alone."

Indeed another visitor had appeared at the door.

"May I come in?"

It was Mr. Jardine, the curate of St. Savior's. He was old, white-haired, shabby of raiment. He carried a brown paper parcel, which he deposited on a chair by the door. Then he advanced diffidently to the table.

"I wanted to ask you—but I have come at an inopportune moment. You are in distress. No bad news, I hope?"

"Oh, no," said Mrs. Jones. "She's only upset herself talking about her husband. I tell her she ought to be very proud of 'im."

"So I am," said Lizzie, raising her tear-stained face. "But I can't get on without him. I want him."

Mr. Jardine spoke gently. "His country wants him."

"There's others," sobbed Lizzie.

"They are all wanted;" and Mr. Jardine continued very gently and kindly. "Compare your fate with that of the people of the invaded countries. The advantages——"

"She has her separation allowance," said Mrs. Jones.

"Yes, yes, I didn't mean that."

"And a half-crown for every child," said Mrs. Jones, offering a further suggestion of comfort.

"Oh, please," said the curate; and he addressed

Lizzie Wade solely, laying his hand on her shoulder. "I know it is weary waiting."

"It's too long—too long. It isn't fair to us women."

"Think of the women of Belgium, the women of Serbia."

"Let their own men fight for them," cried Lizzie, with unanticipated fierceness; "not my man. They've nothing to do with me," and her voice became piteous again. "I'm all alone month after month—and he'll be killed—and I shall be alone for ever. He oughtn't to have gone. I've the right to him, yes, I have. We were made one—in the church. I oughtn't to have let him go. He oughtn't to have left me."

"It was his duty."

"He might have dodged it. Many have;" and Lizzie bowed her head upon her arms once more.

"Ah, no," said the clergyman. "You are overwrought. Those are not your real thoughts. You spoke of your pride. That's the right thought. I honor him. The world honors him. Suppose you had kept him here, you would have been ashamed, miserable."

"Of course she would," said Mrs. Jones cheerily.

"Suppose he dies. God forbid—but still, better

so than that he should have shirked. Think, later, when you tell the story to your little girl."

"It's a boy," said Lizzie, without looking up.

"Yes," said Mrs. Jones, "it's a boy. Only child—so far."

"Well and good," said Mr. Jardine, for the moment disconcerted. "A dear little boy. A man child—to inherit his father's courage and vigor," and he patted Mrs. Wade's shoulder, and continued earnestly: "Believe me—I say it with all reverence and with absolute conviction. If God gave you the choice, to have him here by your side, safe but idle while there are still blows to be struck, or out there in peril and toil, you would not hesitate."

Lizzie Wade stopped crying and began to dry her eyes. "They don't even give him leave," she said sadly. "They promised it—and they put him off."

"No doubt it's difficult with these operations."

"There's always operations."

"And they will be crowned with victory. . . . Believe me," and Mr. Jardine's smile was very kind. "Now be yourself. Be very proud. And remember: he is fighting for your sake, for his child's sake, for the honor of the Empire."

Lizzie Wade stood up, pulled herself together,

and spoke with calmness. "You wished to say something to me, sir, about some work?"

"Yes, but——"

"I am all right now, sir—quite all right."

"Yes," said Mrs. Jones, "she's all right now, sir," and, with apologies for withdrawing, she moved toward the door. "I tell her she ought to be thankful. I've no pride to sustain me with *my* 'usband. Not but what he'd have done his bit if the war 'appened twenty years ago. Oh, nothing would have kep' Mr. Jones out of it. Good night, dear."

Mr. Jardine untied his brown paper parcel and showed Mrs. Wade a gray flannel jacket and trousers.

"I had an accident at the children's fête on Whit-Monday. Do you think you could take the stains out?"

Mrs. Wade examined the rather threadbare garments, and answered confidently: "Yes, sir, I can easily get the stains out, and I'll press them as I did the others."

"Thank you. But not to-night, you know. Any time! You look very tired."

"*I am* tired. Good night, sir."

Left alone, she stretched herself wearily, looked at the baby, sat beside the cradle, and picked up

the newspaper. Before a minute had passed the newspaper rustled and slowly descended with her hands upon her lap. She had fallen asleep.

It seemed to her that the door was being slowly opened. Very, very slowly it opened until there was an aperture wide enough to admit a man. The man entered the room cautiously, closed the door softly, and locked it. The man was in uniform, with his rifle and service equipment. The man was her husband.

"Jim!"

She gave a cry of delight, rushed to him, and embraced him. "Oh, it's too good to be true. Then they gave you leave after all!"

"I'll tell you all about it," said Jim heavily.

"Come and look at your son;" and she dragged him toward the cradle.

"Yes," and he went reluctantly. "For goodness' sake don't rouse him—and speak low. I don't want no noise in here." He glanced at the baby in a perfunctory manner, and then released himself from his wife's embrace. "Let me get these things off."

She watched his every movement with greedy eyes, as he slowly took off his equipment and softly put it on the floor. He looked well, very big

and sunburnt; but there was something dull, heavy, *strange* about him.

He pointed to a chair at the table. "Sit down."

She obeyed him. He sat by the table himself, at a little distance from her; but she moved her chair to his side and put her arm round his neck.

"Now, let us talk quietly."

"Aren't I going to get you some supper?"

"No. I have no appetite. I had all I wanted on the way." As he spoke he had unlinked her arm from his neck, and he took her hand between his hands on the table, caressing it clumsily. "Now—I'm not on leave. I'm home for good."

She gave a gasp of rapture. "Jim! Transferred to home service?"

"Yes, you may put it that way if you like," and he paused. "No. I'm out of it altogether."

She tried to embrace him. "But however have you managed it—they valuing you as they did?"

"I'll tell you. . . . I'd bin meaning it a long time. Fed up. Had my bellyful. And in a secondary manner wanting to be home with you. . . . I took first chance. In charge of prisoners—escorting them down to the 'cage.' When I got down, I made pretense to twist my ankle—unable to walk—and by so doing got into the Dressing Station—and on again to the Field Am-

balance. Out of that I legged it—and at last found myself in the train.”

“But—but without permission—without so much as a railway ticket?”

“Not so fast. I’d provided myself with all that.”

“You had?”

“The warrant book lies on the table in the battalion orderly room. A fortnight ago I contrived to provide myself with a blank warrant out of the bottom of the book. That warrant I duly made out, and took the liberty of signing a pretended officer’s name to it. It wasn’t such pretty nigglin’ handwritin’ as our adjutant’s, but it carried me home safe enough.”

Lizzie’s face was dead white, her lips trembled, she could scarcely speak. “But, Jim, they’ll miss you!”

“Oh, they’ll miss me all right. But I wasn’t such a fool as to put my own name on the warrant. No, Corporal Wade of the 50th Battalion Loyal Londoners is missing from 3921 Field-Ambulance, and Corporal James Wheeler of the 71st Battalion has traveled home to England. He don’t exist—so they’ll have a job to trace him. For the moment you see him before you. To-night he subsides into civilian life under name Number 3. Twig?”

Appalled, she had drawn her hand away and shrunk from him. Her voice was almost inaudible as she asked a question. "Then you—you've deserted?"

"Call it that if you like!"

"But if they catch you?"

"They won't catch me."

"What would they do?"

"Can't you guess?"

"Shoot you?"

He nodded affirmatively. "Make an example of me. They said I was an example to the regiment; so I should end as I begun—an example to the last."

Lizzie covered her face with her hands. She was shivering and shaking. "Oh," she gasped, "it's too horrible."

Jim spoke with feeling. "Liz!"—and he stretched out his hand toward her. "*You're* not going to turn against me? Don't say *you* won't stand by me."

"Jim!" She gave a gasping cry, sank to the ground by his side, and flung her arms round his knees. "No, I don't care what you are, or what you've done. You're my man—my own man!"

Hastily he put his hand over her mouth, to stifle her wild outburst. "Don't make such a damned

noise. You've got to *help*, not *talk*. Stop blubbering."

"Yes, yes."

"And listen. No one saw me come in. No one's to see me go out. No one on earth's to know that I've been here."

"No."

"First thing. I want some clothes to disguise myself. You'll have to buy me a suit of slops."

"Yes. I have the money."

"Good. Then set about it."

He rose, and as he moved from the table his eye fell upon the gray flannel garments lying on the chair. He picked them up at once, and began to examine the size of the jacket and the length of the trousers.

"Whose are these?"

"Mr. Jardine's."

"Who's he?"

"A clergyman. He left them for me to take out the stains."

"They'll do," said Jim decisively. "I don't mind the stains."

"But if you take them, what can I say? It will lead to discovery."

"No. I'll send them to you by post."

She watched him in silence while he took off

his putties, rolled them again, and put them in the cupboard. He laid his rifle on one of the cupboard shelves, and placed his equipment on the rifle, after taking a civilian cap and muffler from his haversack. He told her that she must somehow obtain a box large enough to hold the rifle, and that she must send it and the equipment to the address that he would give her by letter.

"A strong box—one that won't break in transit—and send me the whole bag of tricks. Then I'll bury the lot—or burn 'em. *I'll* attend to that. Understand? If they're seen I'm a dead man."

Then he divested himself of his uniform, bestowed it in the cupboard, and put on the gray jacket and trousers. Dressed thus, with the muffler round his throat and the cap pulled low over his eyes, he looked a mean and sorry kind of cadger. Yet he felt well contented.

"Oof!" And he blew out breath. "The relief of it! I'm *free*. Nobody's slave. My own master. It's a long, long way to Tipperary; but I've got there at last. . . . Now attend to me. Don't be wool-gathering. I am *Jim Walton*. I shall tramp out into the country—Essex way—to find a new home for both of us. You begin your preparations at once. Say you've got employment out of London—say Scotland. Wind up your

affairs here. Pay your rent. Destroy all evidence of your name and the rest of it, and be ready to join me as Mrs. Walton. I'll send you these togs, and you give 'em back to the parson. And you pack me those traps and send them to me as I'll direct"—and there came a touch of emotion to his hitherto businesslike tone: "I'll soon get work. I'm strong, an' brave, an' absolutely 'ealthy. I'll work for both of us. The separation allowance is a loss, but you shan't regret it. You and I, lassie"—as he said this he looked at her very tenderly,—“you and I, side by side, against all the world. An' we'll be happy as birds, little girl—you and me and the kid. Nothin' won't come between us. No doubt they'll want to recruit me again. P'raps they'll do it. But trust me to do silly Billy.” He grinned and shook his head. “Yes, in spite of his previous experience, it'll take them a long time to drill Jimmy Walton. The war'll be finished before *they're* finished. So cheero, sweetheart,” and he kissed her. “Now peep out and see if any one's about.”

She unlocked and opened the door.

“All quiet?”

“Yes.”

“You were asleep when I came in. Go back and sit as you was then.”

She obeyed him, going to the chair by the table and sitting there with the newspaper on her lap.

"Understand," he whispered. "You are asleep. If any one opens the door or asks questions, you know nothing. Nothing whatever has occurred. By-by. So long."

And he stole out of the room.

It seemed to her that the walls of the room were fading, and that light began to shine through them. The light came stronger; everything opened and widened till she saw a broad tract of country; with the sun shining on ruined buildings, broken wire, and shattered trenches. It was as real as what had happened just now. The chalky torn ground, the pathway over loose stones, the pile where walls had fallen—all was solid in the bright sunlight. Soldiers were walking; soldiers were lying down—not moving, lying in all attitudes, quite still, dead. And suddenly she knew that her man would be among them, somewhere among the motionless figures, not among the soldiers who moved.

Every moment the vision became clearer and stronger. And she understood everything. This was a village just captured by our troops, at great cost—the dead men in khaki seemed so many. The

dead men in gray were Germans. They had fought hard, but we had beaten them again. Two English officers with an orderly were looking at the dead. She watched them; she could hear their voices.

"This was where B Company caught it, sir," said one of the officers. "Good old B Company. They weren't to be denied."

"They never are," said the other officer; and she knew that they must be the colonel and the adjutant.

Ah! They had found him. The younger officer stooped and raised the heavy head, looked into the sightless eyes. It was her man.

"Wade. Corporal Wade, sir."

"Bad luck," said the colonel. "There wasn't a truer-hearted man in the battalion."

The adjutant had picked up something and was looking at it. They both looked at it. "He must have brought this out after he was hit, and died with it in his hands."

"What is it?"

"A photograph, I suspect, sir."

She knew well what it was—the little leather case with her picture that she had given him such a long time ago. He had promised to carry it always.

They opened the case, looked inside, and read the inscription:

"Lizzie, 1915!"

"His wife," said the colonel. "Poor woman! Write to her for me—write to her very nicely, and say he was beloved by all. Tell her he died as he would have wished, leading his section to the attack. Say he did not die in vain."

Instantaneously the vision faded. All was darkness, blankness; then the walls of the room showed again in the dull lamplight.

She had been leaning forward in her chair with outstretched arms. Now she sank upon her knees and raised her arms above her head.

"O God," she cried, "merciful God, give me the choice. Make the other only a dream. Make it like this. Let him have died—for his wife's sake, for his child's sake, for the honor of the Empire."

She staggered to her feet, rubbing her eyes and sobbing convulsively.

The baby was awake, too, and she went to the cradle to quiet him. "Oh, dear, oh, dear. Mother's had such dreams—such cruel dreams. Ssh! There—there—there."

Suddenly she started, rushed to the cupboard

and opened it. The shelves were empty, except for the tea-things and groceries that had been there hours before. Then she went to the chair by the table, and looked at Mr. Jardine's flannel jacket and trousers. They lay on the chair just as she had folded them. They had not been touched.

A man's voice sounded from the court down below—a man's voice shouting "Lizzie!" There came a noise of people in the stone entrance hall and on the stone stairs. The man's voice was singing on the stairs: *It's a Long, Long Way to Tipperary.*

She stood in the middle of the room with her hand upon her heart, staring at the door.

"Lizzie! Lizzie!"

The door opened, and he burst into the room—her man. He was in full equipment, excited, happy, gay. He put his rifle against the wall and took her in his arms.

"Liz, my darling."

"You've come back? You—you're alive?"

"Alive! Can't you see me? Can't you feel me?" And he hugged and kissed her. "Alive? Lor' lumme. Wild with life! *In the pink!*"

"But how have you come? Why have you come?"

"What d'y'e mean? I've come for Liz—an' the boy. Where's my son? Show me my son."

But she had got between him and the cradle; she was holding him, struggling with him wildly.

"Yes, yes," she gasped, "but tell me."

"Don't keep me from my son."

Still she detained him. "You've not come back for good an' all?"

"For good an' all! Peace hasn't been declared—not as I've heard."

"And you're going to return to the battalion—I mean soon?"

"I'm going in ten days—not before."

"They've given you ten days' leave?"

"Yes," and he took her by the shoulders, held her at arm's length, and looked hard at her. "Liz, this isn't the welcome I expected. What's up? What's wrong?"

"Nothing. It's all right;" and she writhed and clung to him. "Oh, kiss me again. I've had such dreams of you. But this is true. No dreams. Ten days of heaven. You and I."

"Yes, you and I."

"Oh, Jim, my brave dear husband! There," and she stood aside, raised her head high, and spoke very proudly: "Come and see your son."

A WIDOW

HER looking-glass told Mrs. Burt that she was still a very attractive woman; and her heart told her that, being a good deal nearer forty than thirty, she was more than ready for a third husband.

She thought of the awful slaughter of men during the war, and the consequent diminution of the chances of any woman's getting a mate. And when you had had two already, and were not so young as you used to be! Such thoughts made her feel almost desperate. All the young blooming girls who had lost their sweethearts were now to be counted against one. She thought of the chances that she had thrown away in 1913 and 1914—one at Harrogate, one at Southend, and half a one here in Brighton.

With a growing indignation she read of young war-widows marrying again, and studied their photographs in the illustrated newspapers. Indecent. If she had been married to a lad who gave his life during the war, she would have remained a widow to the end of it. But she had been single throughout the conflict. At the rate these

little hussies were devouring survivors, the men simply wouldn't go round. The authorities would have to license Mormonism.

And her thoughts drifted off into the realm of speculation. Would it come to that at last—one man having five or six wives? As the papers said, the world was now being driven by the iron force of circumstances, the whole fabric of society was in the melting-pot; more unlikely things might happen. She fell to musing on the feminine mind. Could one ever bring one's self to be satisfied with only a share in the devotion and care provided by a husband? Perhaps a certain type of man might fulfill the obligations of so difficult a task—but he would have to be a real lord and master, somebody quite different from the late Mr. Burt and the earlier Mr. Hopkins.

Mr. Hopkins, her first, was a coal merchant, and Mr. Burt, her second, had been sometime borough surveyor of a moderate-sized town; but neither of them—No. What was the Latin quotation? *Nil bonus mortuary*? Let bygones be bygones. Whatever their faults, between them they had left her about eight hundred a year and some quite valuable, if old-fashioned, jewelry.

She went about the world with her maid, Jenner, staying in hotels, or boarding-houses;

and, thus escaping the burden and expense of a private establishment, she was really very well-off. Indeed Jenner used to say she was too well-off to be so eager to change her condition. Jenner had a tea-making apparatus and made afternoon tea in the bedroom; and if Mrs. Burt felt low of an evening, or at any other time, Jenner was always capable of serving a confidential whisky and soda without troubling the hotel management. By these little arts Jenner kept down the bills and made life more pleasant. Old Jenner was a treasure—there was no other word for it—and because of her long and faithful service she was allowed considerable freedom of speech; so that when she and her mistress chatted together they were rather like the heroine and the confidante in one of those old comedies.

"There you are again," said Jenner; "always at it. I do believe you never see a pair of trousers but what you think there's a husband inside 'em coming your way."

"Nothing of the sort," said Mrs. Burt. "No, you wrong me, Jenner. My taste is much too fastidious. I should be woefully hard to please, if I ever did make up my mind to another venture."

"Oh," said Jenner, shaking her gray head, "you're too romantic altogether."

But she was not really romantic. Although very fond of show and fashion, she had sharp business instincts, and was by no means of a naturally trustful disposition. After spending a frivolous hour at an Oxford Street milliner's, choosing the sort of hat that she fancied would best suit her, she would go to the bank in Chancery Lane and methodically clip off the ripe coupons from her bearer bonds. She kept them in a locked box, and did not care for the notion of the manager playing with them. Also she was quick to think herself imposed on at railway booking-offices.

"You've given me short change."

"No, I haven't."

"I beg your pardon, you have; and if you don't refund this instant, I'll go straight to the station-master."

"Why don't you look at your ticket? It's marked plain enough. One-and-three."

"Oh!" The fare had been raised again. "Shameful!" She went away repeating the word.

Well, then, having been dressed by Jenner after tea one day, she came down the stairs at Versailles, Regency Square, Brighton, looking very grand indeed. She was a large lady, with

nut-brown hair and a florid complexion; her satin blouse had the richest embroidery, and was further decorated by her big diamond crescent and a ruby locket; her skirts had the rustle that can only be made by the best silk, though so often imitated with inferior materials. She passed through the lounge-hall, and stood for a moment on the steps outside the front door. It was a glorious August afternoon. People were sitting on the steps of boarding-houses on the other side of the square; a gay crowd filled the King's Road, and from the pier there came sounds of music; now and then a motor-car slipped by with wounded soldiers in blue. One saw soldiers in khaki everywhere, and hundreds of flaunting girls—munition workers, as she judged—following them, or hanging on to them, or impudently making their acquaintance without formal introduction. The sea, the asphalt, the glass shelters, all glittered and flashed in the warm sunlight.

Mrs. Burt came back to the lounge, sat down, picked up a copy of that admirably illustrated daily, *The Glass of Fashion*, and sighed softly.

Next moment she became aware of the officer. He was in uniform—a big bold man of about thirty-five; handsome, too, except for the mark

of the saber cut on his nose. And that is a merit, rather than a disfigurement, nowadays. He carried a swagger cane, and he slapped his leg with it now and then. He moved about, and stared at the few people sitting in the lounge in a way that made you lower your eyes or look at your paper. He had put Mrs. Burt in something of a flutter even before he took an empty chair near her and opened a conversation.

He told her his name at once—Captain Shelley.

"There is a poet of that name," said Mrs. Burt, with her finest manner. "Any relation?"

"Yes—but distant. I've never met him."

"Poetry hasn't come out in *you*?"

"Oh, no, I'm not a poet;" and he had a devil-may-care laugh. "I like *reality*—something solid that I can grapple with," and he looked hard at her. "Not airy fairy nonsense."

Mrs. Burt dropped her eyes, and then spoke with an assumption of casual politeness.

"On leave?"

"No, light duty."

"I dare say you've earned a little repose by what you've gone through."

"Well, I've been in it from the beginning;" and he told her about the saber cut—done by Uhlans

in the retreat from Mons. Three of them, however, had bit the dust for doing it.

Mrs. Burt shivered. "I think you are all of you too splendid for words. But, oh, it is so dreadful."

"Don't you worry about that;" and he laughed again.

They sat talking; and some of the things he said and his manner of saying them filled her with a delicious confusion. Presently one of the beribboned maids came and beat the gong, and the captain started at the noise.

"What the dickens is it?"

"Only dressing gong. Not dinner. Personally, I am already dressed."

"Yes, so I should imagine. You could hardly make yourself more gorgeous, could you?"

"Oh, please——"

Then he told her about shell-shock. He had had that, too, for a little while. It still rendered him a bit jumpy.

"*What* they make you go through! We simply can't visualize it, sitting here safe at home."

They were alone in the lounge now; the other people had obeyed the warning of the gong. But their *tête-à-tête* was suddenly interrupted by a new arrival.

It was a young man dressed in a blue serge suit; he came sauntering through the front door and looked round the lounge.

"Oh, blow!" said Captain Shelley, under his breath.

"Hullo. *There* you are," said the young man. "I've been hunting for you all over Brighton. I want to settle up, you know." Then he saw that his friend was in the company of a lady. "Beg pardon. Can I have a few words?"

Mrs. Burt half rose from her cane armchair, but Captain Shelley smilingly put his hand on her arm and detained her.

"Don't go," he said. "It's no secrets. Jack and I have nothing to be ashamed of." And he made a formal introduction. "The Honorable Mr. John Pierpont—Mrs. Burt. . . . Now, Jack, what's your hurry?"

Mrs. Burt resumed her scrutiny of *The Glass of Fashion*; but she heard all that they said, and she was enormously interested. It appeared that the two friends had been at a card party on the previous evening, and Mr. Pierpont, having lost, was now come to pay his debt. Captain Shelley, for his part, did not wish to be paid so promptly, saying it could stand over for revenge, and the money, if he took it, would only burn a hole in his

pocket. At this, however, the younger man seemed to get slightly nettled; for he said, "You seem to forget it is a debt of honor." On which Captain Shelley said, with curtness, "Very well. Have it your own way." Then, when the amount was mentioned, Mrs. Burt nearly jumped out of her cane chair; and, as it were automatically, she came back into the conversation.

"Do you mean to say that you two gentlemen play cards for such high stakes that the sum of six hundred and fifty pounds passes in a single evening?"

They both laughed.

"Does that shock you?"

"Indeed it does. You remarked just now that you had nothing to be ashamed of. But I think you ought to be thoroughly ashamed of yourselves."

"Oh, it's nothing," said Mr. Pierpont, laughing. "He knows it's only *lent*. I'll have it all back, and more, before I've done with him." He had handed Captain Shelley a packet of big notes, and he told the captain to count them.

"I'll take 'em for granted, Jack."

"Thank you," said Jack, with dignity, "I prefer you to count them."

"What a stickler for etiquette you are." Captain

Shelley verified the correctness of the notes by twirling their corners, and put the packet in the breast pocket of his tunic. "Well, that's all, Jack."

"Excuse me," said Jack. "You have had your money. I'll trouble you for my I.O.U."

"By Jove, yes." The captain laughed. "I forgot. No one will ever make a business man of *me*." And he brought a bulging letter case from the skirt pocket of his tunic, extracted a small bit of paper, and handed it to his friend.

"Righto," said Jack. "Good evening, madam;" and he bowed and withdrew.

In the next few minutes Mrs. Burt talked very seriously to her new acquaintance. "You may think it strange that I should take the liberty of offering advice to a stranger; but this war has turned the world so topsy-turvy that one does things now that one wouldn't have *dreamed* of doing."

"Fire ahead."

And she said how wrong it was for gentlemen to gamble at games of hazard—especially officers—in war-time. "Believe me, it isn't right." She said this very charmingly, smiling, and yet in an earnest tone. "And, if I may say it, I don't like your friend, the Honorable Mr. Pierpont."

"Why, what's the matter with Jack?"

"I've no quarrel with his manners—which are just what one would expect in a person of his birth—but I don't think he's a good friend for you."

"Don't you?" Captain Shelley got up, stretched himself, and stood looking down at her. "Perhaps you're right. I *want* a friend. Well, any more advice?"

"Now you are offended. You think I have taken a liberty?"

"Don't you know that a pretty woman *can't* take a liberty?"

"Oh, please——"

"I shall think you have lost interest in me if you don't go on."

"Then I *will*." And Mrs. Burt spoke to him about his winnings at cards. "Being alone in the world, I am forced to be worldly-wise. Put that money in the bank. You said yourself it would burn a hole in your pocket."

"And so it will."

"That's not right in war-time—or any other time. Take my advice. Get a large registered envelope, put those notes inside, and send it to your bank for the credit of your account. It'll

be safe there, and it won't be leading you into temptation."

"How you lecture one."

"No, I don't. I simply ask you to do something wise and proper for your own good. Brighton's not the place to go carrying about valuable bank-notes in your pocket."

With an impulsive gesture, he pulled out the bundle of notes, and offered them to her.

"You take charge of them for me. Then you'll know I'm out of temptation, and I shall know they are safe."

"No, that's out of the question—quite impossible." And Mrs. Burt smiled. "How do you know they'd be safe with me?" she added archly. "I might run away with them. You are taking my financial position very much on credit."

"Bosh! I trust you all right. Keep them for me."

"No. But do what I have said. Promise me that you'll send them straight to the bank."

He put the notes back in his pocket, and stood looking at her with bold searching eyes.

"Is that just business advice?" he said, in a low voice. "Or do you ask it as a favor?"

Mrs. Burt had to look another way. His eyes seemed to be burning her. She was so troubled

that she stammered; and the words that she said fell strangely on her ear, as if they were different words from those that she expected, or as if he was making her say just what he pleased. "If—if you insist—then promise—as a favor to me."

"I promise. Now I must be off."

"What? Aren't you staying here, in this establishment?"

"Oh, no."

"Then what are you doing here?"

"I was passing, and I saw you come out on the steps—and, well, I suppose you bowled me over. By-by."

He was gone, and he had left her breathless.

Throughout the *table d'hôte* dinner she was silent and dreamy. She could only think of him. It is curious how you may know people a long time and yet really know very little about them; and how, on the other hand, there are occasions when chance brings about a complete disclosure of a person's character and circumstances in a very brief space. During that one conversation she seemed to have learned everything about Captain Shelley. He belonged to a good family, had aristocratic friends, was rich but extravagant. He was in the A.S.C. Regiment. By temperament bold to a fault, reckless, generous in an offhand style.

With regard to women he was desperately cool in his manners, and, if the truth must be faced, probably very dangerous.

She was touched, in retrospect, by what he had said to his friend about there being no hurry to collect that awful card debt; and she was very much touched indeed by his anxiety to confide the money to her care. What an idea! Above all, she was deeply stirred by that final reckless speech. Bowled over! *What* an expression!

He turned up again about nine o'clock. She was seated with other ladies in chairs outside the front door, watching the pier lamps; and her heart leapt in her ample bosom when he spoke to her.

"Come for a stroll on the pier. . . . Never mind about a hat. Throw that lace thing over your head. That's what the Spanish dames do"—and as they walked off side by side, he whispered to her: "My word, you do look fetching by night."

"Please. I really beg."

There was a crowd on the pier, and it all seemed like fairyland. It seemed to her that her gallant, dashing companion excited feminine curiosity in every direction. The band program was over too soon. When they played *God Save the King* he stood to attention, saluting all the time, and

she thought he was the handsomest warrior that had ever worn the king's uniform. She came off the pier, among the surging crowd, with her hand on his muscular arm, scarcely knowing where she was, content to be guided and controlled by him.

Beyond the turnstiles he changed direction left, took her down the flight of steps to that asphalt path which is used by the children on donkeys in day-time, past the funny little arches, by the boats, over the shingle, anywhere away from the crowd; and somewhere in a vague wild whirlwind, as it seemed, he made bold and terrific love to her. When he kissed her she nearly tumbled backward; but he recovered her, and did it again. Her "Oh, pleases," were like the bleats of a sheep caught by a raging lion; at the gentlest, his endearments were more like prize-fighting than ordinary love-making; and even in the midst of it, while struggling to keep her balance, she mentally recalled the timid caresses of Mr. Burt and the almost brotherly embrace of Mr. Hopkins. It was all over extraordinarily quickly—really only a kiss or two and a torrent of impassioned words—but while it lasted it was stupendous.

After this the affair went at lightning speed. It seemed incredible that until thirty-six hours

ago she had never set eyes on him, and yet they were practically engaged to be married. It was madness; but, as they both confessed, they had fallen crazily in love with each other.

He called her "Little Woman"; and that she certainly was not, whatever she might be. She called him "Boy," and told him why she had so named him. "Because you are nothing but a great, big, overgrown boy, and I tell myself that's your excuse when you go on in a way that would otherwise make me angry."

Jenner, the maid, shook her head, and said, "Well, this is a case, with a vengeance."

"Oh, Jenner," said her mistress; "he has simply swept me off my feet. I am carried away by it."

"So I understand," said Jenner dryly.

"But am I wise to do it?" In these confidences Mrs. Burt was nervous and trembling, even tearful. "Jenner, he's so strong, so masterful. He may be an awful tyrant later on."

"You'll find that a bit of a change," said Jenner very dryly.

"It would break his heart if I tried to back out. His violence frightens me, even as it is. I shouldn't *dare*. No, I could only escape by flight. Sometimes I've half a mind to run away from

him," and Mrs. Burt began to cry. "Am I silly? I should die if he took to bullying me. I am older than he is—a little. Oh, Jenner!"

"Have a whisky and soda," said Jenner.

"You can't counsel me, how can you? But, Jenner, tell me frankly; you've nothing in your mind against him? Thanks."

"What should I have against him! I'll say this much in his favor. He seems to be pretty fluent with his money. He gave me a sovereign this morning."

"Did he? Not to bribe you?"

"I don't know."

"What did he say exactly?"

"Oh, he spoke laughing like. Says I was to take care of you, and perhaps I'd have somebody to help me take care of you before long," and then slaps his leg with his stick.

"Yes, he does that," said Mrs. Burt ecstatically. "I know just what you mean. It's a little trick of his. I have seen him do it often . . . You have made this rather stiff."

Thirty-six hours, forty-eight hours, seventy-two hours—such a lot was happening that it might have been a year. They went about together in the afternoons—to Shoreham, to Rottingdean—and in the evening they went on

the pier. He had tried to make her his banker in one sense, and now he made her his banker in another, borrowing a fiver from her to pay for these little excursions and treats. He had kept the promise about sending the money to his bank, and had told them to send him a fresh check book, as he had exhausted his old one. For the moment he had to draw on her.

He gave her his photograph, but reluctantly.

"Little Woman, I haven't one that does me justice."

"Then come and let's both be photographed."

"Oh, no. Your photograph is printed here," and he touched his tunic in front. "And as you are going to have my old mug opposite to you for the rest of your days, you can't want a picture of me."

"But I do, Boy. Little Woman wants it dreadfully. For her to take out and look at when Boy isn't with her."

So then he produced a photograph from his bulgy pocketbook. It was only *carte-de-visite* size, just the head; but a good likeness, with eyes staring as in life, and the saber cut showing plainly. He said she was to keep it to herself and not let anybody see it. "It's for you, Little Woman, and no one else."

The things he said sometimes were like the speeches that make you quiver when you read them in books, and thrill when you hear them spoken on the stage. He said he would make her his plaything one minute and his queen the next. "I'll tame your proud beauty, and then I'll set it on a pedestal and worship it on my knees." He said she dressed "too old," and that after their marriage he would have her dress as quite a young girl, in the brightest colors, "like a bird of paradise." He admired her jewelry, but objected to the antiquated setting. He said he would have all the diamonds and other gems taken out of the gold and reset as a butterfly or tiara, buying more diamonds to make up the quantity required. To this he would add three ropes of pearls, left to him by an old aunt, of the name of Lady Elizabeth. And then with these ornaments, in a ball dress from Paris, his little woman would "fairly knock them."

But, like lightning from a summer sky, came a violent outburst, and he would really frighten her for a moment or two. At a word he could set himself on fire with jealousy.

"Understand, you have fascinated me, and you must bear all the consequences. I don't believe you have ever met a real man before—and you've

conquered him, but, mark you, my lady, he means to conquer you too. By heaven, if you ever looked at anybody else, if you ever tried to play me false——”

“Oh, Boy!”

“Do you know what I’d do with you? First, I’d give you a dashed good hiding,” and he slapped his leg ferociously.

“Boy! You—you couldn’t be so cruel.”

“Yes, I could. Then next, I’d wring the neck of the man who’d come between us. There. I can’t pretend. If you don’t like it, say so. That’s the sort of man I am. Take me or leave me.”

She decided irrevocably to take him. His violence alarmed, but his charms allured. Never had she tasted such emotion as his rapid changes of tone evoked. She thought of the insipidity of Mr. Burt and Mr. Hopkins. After a tiff Mr. Burt used to say, “I hope I didn’t wound your feelings yesterday;” and Mr. Hopkins would knock at her door, and say, “May I come in, dear?”—in his own house, and to his own wife. How could she doubt or hesitate? It was a brilliant, a dazzlingly brilliant match. An officer, a swell, a hero! “Yes, my aunt by marriage, Lady Elizabeth. Yes, these pearls are family jewels. Boy hung them round my neck the morning we were made one.”

Monday—that was the day he came into the lounge. Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday. This Thursday afternoon and evening were dreamlike, tempestuous, fantastic. As she said, she was whirled away. He would wait no longer. Tomorrow morning he was rushing off to London to get a special license; and on Saturday, without a word to anybody, they would be united. Tomorrow he would do an immense amount of business in London. He was taking up all her jewelry to put it into the hands of Messrs. Tiffany, for them to prepare an estimate of the resetting. He would get out the pearls from the safe at his chambers in the Albany; he would buy the wedding ring; and he wanted to pay off a few bachelor bills. For this purpose he made her change checks with him. That is, he gave her a check out of his new check book for six hundred and fifty pounds, and she gave him one of her checks for a like amount. This, he explained, would save him a lot of time and trouble. On his way from London Bridge he would cash her check at the Chancery Lane Bank, and hand in his. It would be a double-entry transaction, and provide him with the cash in the quickest possible way. She scarcely understood or tried to understand. She did whatever he told her to do.

All these matters were settled on Thursday evening, which they spent in the reading-room of the boarding-house instead of on the pier. She was painfully fluttered, and she thought chiefly of her guilty secret. She had done something that he might not approve of, and she trembled at the idea of his possible anger. He had told her not to show his photograph, and he spoke now of their being married without a word to anybody.

But she had sent his photograph and her own photograph to the editor of *The Glass of Fashion*, with compliments and a suggestion that they should be inserted as pictures of a newly-engaged couple. She could not resist doing it. She had waited so long; she had seen so many such pictures: "Viscountess Saltash, who will wed Major Loftus Jones on the 18th"; "War widow weds brother officer of first husband," and so on. Now it was her turn, and she could not refrain from taking it.

Would Boy be angry? No, he must forgive Little Woman for a tiny touch of pardonable vanity. She might truly plead that she was so proud of him she could not agree to conceal him.

"You look thoughtful. Anything on your mind?" He had risen; and, with the parcel in his hand, was about to tear himself away.

"No, dear."

"All right. I'll be back by the six o'clock train. You meet me at the station. Ta, ta, Little Woman."

Friday seemed endless, even before six o'clock. She was at once sustained and agitated by the day's issue of *The Glass of Fashion*. They were *in*—side by side. "Mrs. Burt and Captain Shelley to be wed shortly." The captain was better printed than the lady. He came out splendidly, staring eyes, saber cut, all complete; so that you could recognize him right across the room, with the open newspaper propped up on top of the chest of drawers.

She received congratulations from all the boarding-house guests. In peace-time they would have been wildly excited. Even now they displayed considerable interest.

He did not return by the six o'clock train; nor by the six-forty; nor the seven-fifteen. The waiting at the station was terrible to her. By half past eight she was almost demented. She thought of all the ghastly accidents that might have happened to him—run over by an omnibus, crushed by a falling house, killed in the shaft of a lift. After the arrival of the eight-forty she

became a little calmer. The station officials suggested that perhaps a brother officer might have brought him back in a motor-car; or he might be flying back in an aeroplane; or, more likely still, he might have sent a telegram saying why he was delayed. They advised her to go home and see if there was a telegram or telephone message waiting for her there. She jumped into a taxi-cab, and went, trembling and gasping, to Regency Square.

The lounge was in a state of agitation. There were police officers in it—ordinary police and military police.

"Oh, great heavens, what is it?"

They had come for Boy. They, too, were anxiously waiting for Boy.

They led her into the manager's little room, and closed the door on a bevy of inquisitive guests. And the chief policeman laid out on the table a copy of the day's *Glass of Fashion*, and showed her Boy's picture.

"Yes, that is he, of course."

Then the policeman laid out another *Glass of Fashion*, of a date three months ago, and showed her just the same picture of him. But, oh, the wording under this earlier picture!

"DO YOU KNOW THIS MAN?"—in capitals;

and in smaller type, "If so, help the police to trace him. He is a professional bigamist and also a deserter from the Army. Has victimized many foolish women during the course of the war." And they gave his description. "Injury to nose from the kick of a horse," and so on.

Mrs. Burt stared despairingly at the newspaper. She saw everything clearly now; she understood everything. He was the logical product of these dreadful times; he was the forerunner of that authorized Mormonism, about which she had vaguely speculated; he was the masterful man with several wives. She did not give a thought to her lost jewelry or her emptied banking account. She was so pitiably in love with him still that she asked herself: Would not a fifth or sixth share of Boy have been better than this total blank, this unmitigated misery?

THE SHORT CUT

FUNNY things happened to one in the war—coincidences, lucky chances, totally inexplicable events. One used to wonder about them and then forget them. So much was happening that nothing could hold its place in one's mind for long.

To young Mr. Brown, the regimental transport officer of a battalion newly arrived in France, there was such a delightful freshness and glamour about the war that he must be pardoned if he childishly wished that it would not be over *quite* so soon as the experts predicted. On these pleasant October afternoons when he first rode up to the trenches at the head of his limbered wagons, he could not refrain from hoping that the war would last over Christmas and till the early spring of 1916.

Like thousands of other young officers of the new armies, he felt so very proud of being in it at last. He was proud of belonging to a splendid battalion, proud of the cap-badge that signified a gloriously famous regiment; proud of his well-

groomed horses, his keen, resolute drivers, his nicely turned out brakesmen, his glittering harness buckles and shining trace chains. The battalion had been given a really nice bit of the line just in front of the ruined village of La Prunelle; the communication trenches ran down into the ruins of the village street; and, by what was a tremendous piece of luck for a transport officer, the lie of the ground enabled you to come up in daylight almost as safely as under the cover of night.

A good high road took you across the three miles of waste ground that intervened between La Prunelle and the last of the inhabited villages; and shells, aimed at nothing in particular, came sailing over the slight ridge that hid the enemy's position, and burst here and there with innocent noisiness. Then you came to leafless trees, cross-roads, sand-bagged barriers, and a blue metal signboard that told you it was straight on to Maison Rouge Farm, half right to Martincourt, half left to Bretel-des-Prés, and short to the left into La Prunelle. But at present you could not go in any direction except sharp to the left, because all the other places mentioned on the signboard were still in the hands of the Germans. Going the correct way, then, Lieutenant Brown

led his little procession of wagons through the ruins. There had been much fighting here in 1914, the village being lost and retaken several times, and the damage caused by repeated bombardments was heavy. Not a roof remained in position; more than half the houses were just heaps of bricks and stone, and the rest were merely torn carcasses; the church tower was still standing; and there were some good cellars uninjured. Some of the cellars were used as billets for the company in support; a few of the lower stories of buildings had been fitted up as cook-houses; and there were plenty of respectable dug-outs that had been made by the French before they handed over the estate to their allies. The church tower was a mark long since carefully registered by the German artillery, so that shells often burst in its vicinity, and a little way beyond it the street could be swept by machine-gun fire dropping into it from no one knew where. When this occurred, as it had more than once already, every sign of life instantly vanished from the street, and the regimental transport found itself all alone in its glory. You can not put horses and wagons down into dug-outs, or send them for shelter along communication trenches; the barricades and impediments of the street prevented

your hurrying on at a trot or gallop; there was nothing to do but continue your slow progress in a dignified manner.

Lieutenant Brown looked Napoleonically dignified as he rode through the barricades, with the bullets pattering on all that was left of garden walls and villa front doors. He and his men liked it, in these early days. It was business, what they had come out for; and they wished that, without risk, those at home could be here to see them doing it. The crump of an incoming shell is pleasanter by daylight than in the dark, and machine-gun fire is quite inspiring until its novelty has worn off.

Arrived at their destination the rations wagons were off-loaded by the company quartermaster-sergeants; somebody else took charge of the fuel wagon; any wagons with ammunition or trench stores were handed over to the regimental sergeant-major, and for a little while Mr. Brown was free of them. It was his duty now to go down into the orderly room dug-out, report there, and obtain any further orders. His next job might be to go to brigade headquarters at Graviercourt to fetch more ammunition, bombs, fireworks, what not; or perhaps there were hurdles and heavy material to be brought from the R. E. dump; or

the battalion suddenly remembered that it wanted something else. Whatever might be wanted, it was his duty to fetch and carry it; but if nothing at all was wanted he could go quietly home to St. Fernand, the village where he lived with his horses, and he and everybody else could be safely snoring by nine-fifteen P. M. Of course they might be turned out again by nine-sixteen, or at any time during the night; because the whole brigade area was beautifully linked up with wires, and telegrams were punctually delivered at all hours.

To-day there was a red hat in the orderly room dug-out, and Mr. Brown modestly waited until the wearer of the hat had done talking to his adjutant. It was the principal staff officer of the brigade, what is called the brigade-major, and in this case a splendid fellow.

"Well, Brown," said the adjutant presently. "Nothing for you to-day, I think."

"Hello, Brown," said the brigade-major jovially. "How are your old skins?"

"Very well, thank you, sir."

"Let's have a look at 'em;" and he led the way up the dug-out steps.

Up in the street he looked at a wagon and horses, and told Mr. Brown that if they were all

as good as that they did him credit. And Mr. Brown blushed with pleasure. The kindness and affability of the staff almost overwhelmed him.

"By the way, Brown, when you come from here to the brigade for stores, what's your road?"

"Well, sir, I have to go right back to St. Fernand and then up the other road to Graviercourt."

"No, you don't have to," said the brigade-major rather severely. "You may do it for your own amusement, but there's a short cut straight across. And that's the proper way to come, if you want to save useless work for your horses and men—as you ought to be wanting all the time."

"Yes, sir," said Mr. Brown.

The seriousness and decisive tone of the staff quite overwhelmed him.

"You should reconnoiter, you know."

"Yes, sir, I meant to; but we haven't been here very long."

"I know. But there are such things as maps. You should study your maps;" and the brigade-major brought a mud-stained map out of his pocket. "See here."

"I did know of the track, sir. It's plainly marked. But I thought it was under observation."

"No, it's all right, and it saves you six miles

each way. Here we are. La Prunelle;" and with his thumb he measured the distance to Gravier-court. "A mile and a half, as the crow flies." Then he refolded the map and pointed up the street. "Turn short before the Gendarmerie, go down through the orchards, past the R.E. You'll come to some graves on your left hand, and then it's straight on to the windmill. Here's the general. Come along with us, and I'll show you."

Next moment Lieutenant Brown was absolutely walking up the street with the general—right by the signals office, B Company's headquarters and cook-house, by the medical aid post, by everything, with the whole world watching him. It made him hot and breathless—going off like this for a walk with the general and the brigade-major. Officers saluted, men stood to attention.

"I have told him he can bring his wagons by our short cut," said the brigade-major.

"Oh, yes," said the general. "I wonder you hadn't tumbled to that already, Brown."

"I thought it wasn't safe, sir."

"Well, you needn't come if the sun's shining. But this time of the clock—or on misty days—and at night, of course."

Every one in the brigade adored the general.

It was not only that he was a clinking fine soldier, he was such a tip-topper all round. He was tall and big, with a pleasant laugh, and a jolly, chaffing manner; yet he could make you tremble in your boots if things weren't just so. He wore the ribbons of many medals, and these, together with the red band on his cap and the gold and red tabs on his tunic, made him look very magnificent. Those useful but disfiguring steel hats had not yet been issued to troops.

"How old are you, Brown?" he asked, as they turned out of the street and dived down a narrow lane through the apple orchards.

"Twenty-three, sir."

"Do you like the war?"

"I love it, sir."

"Do you?" The general laughed, and he went on in his jolly, chaffing way:

"Got any sisters, Brown?"

"Two, sir."

"I should think," said the general, speaking to the brigade-major, "that Brown's sisters must be very nice-looking. It runs in families like that sometimes. But perhaps not so clever as you, Brown, eh?"

"I shouldn't like to say, sir," and Mr. Brown tittered shyly.

"Well, you give your sisters my compliments, when you write, and say I said you're doing very well out here, and they'll be proud of you before you're done."

"Thank you, sir."

"Got a sweetheart, Brown?"

"Oh, really, sir!" Mr. Brown tittered again, and blushed. He was delighted with, but almost prostrated by, the general's chaff.

"That would be telling, eh?" And the general laughed once more. "And still keep something to yourself you will not tell to any."

They were now out on the open ground, a vast undulating plain that looked indescribably desolate in the fading daylight. On each side of the track there were disused trenches, all weed-grown and tumbling in; rusty wire entanglements stretched away on both sides, with hummocks of earth and deep holes that had been dug as breast-works and gun pits; and about two hundred yards to the right, running parallel to the track, there was a roadway built up high on an embankment, with rows of torn and shredded trees and dismantled telegraph posts. When the track rose a little one could see across this roadway and make out the position of our front line trenches, which showed as yellowish stripes on the dull brown

surface of sloping ground. The German trenches were just over the crest of the low ridge, and really one wanted the word of a general or his principal staff officer to make one believe that the Germans could be so close without being able to spot one.

As they walked on, the general spoke quite seriously of the fighting that had taken place here last year. He said that Mr. Brown ought to feel he was on hallowed ground, because his own regiment had been engaged in the final struggles before the line settled down.

"The Royal Fusiliers, sir?"

"Yes, your second battalion." And the general was good enough to say that, as always, the regiment had distinguished itself. But it had lost heavily. One whole company was cut to pieces.

"You'll see some of the graves farther on," said the brigade-major. "But now look here, Brown, my boy, you needn't come as far as that. You can see exactly where you are;" and he showed Lieutenant Brown his bearings, so that he could not possibly make a mistake. The track bore away to the left, leaving the roadway more and more to the right. That excrescence about a mile ahead was all that remained of the windmill.

You passed it close on your left. Those trees were the outskirts of Graviercourt; and the track became a road again there and took you through orchards, as it had done at La Prunelle, right into the village.

"And you may see something among those trees," said the general, "that you needn't mention to anybody. They are putting in some howitzers, but their voices won't be heard for a long while. Remember, Brown, gun positions are like sweethearts—to be kept quiet to one's self."

"Yes, sir, thank you, sir," and Lieutenant Brown saluted.

"Good night, old chap," said the general, just exactly as if he had been another subaltern.

The general with the brigade-major went on, and Mr. Brown went back toward La Prunelle and his wagons. When he looked round over his shoulder the red hats had disappeared, swallowed already in the grayness and vagueness of the waste. He stepped out briskly, with a sudden feeling that he was more utterly alone than he had ever been in all his life. He thought of the order forbidding officers to move about unaccompanied. Although the Germans could not see one, they could shoot one. All bullets aimed at our front line and passing over it came drifting down this

way. He had heard some of them just now whistling above his head. If one were hit, one would bleed to death before anybody came along the track to find one. Or one might lie half through the night and get stifled in the mud, or be run over by an artillery limber while still unconscious. He was not in the least afraid, but never till now had he experienced the sensation of helplessness that can be created in a moment by unusual solitude.

And never till now had he seen how sinister an aspect the jolly old war could unexpectedly assume. The light was nearly gone, everything was gray and shapeless, and yet one could see a long way in all directions. But nowhere did one see a sign of life; everywhere one saw signs of death and destruction. This tangled wire, the ugly cavernous trenches, the mounds and holes, all meant blood and wounds and dying groans. Not a movement, not even the sound of a voice—the place was so completely dead that one ceased to remember all the live men hidden in the ground, only a few hundred yards away, friends and foes eagerly watching and waiting to do some more killing; the desultory rifle fire, the machine-gun fire, the occasional artillery fire seemed no longer to be an evidence of human agency; one had a

superstitious fancy that one was dead one's self, and that the dead men who had fought last year would emerge from among the weeds and the wire to greet one as a new companion.

It was quite a relief to come upon some sappers outside their dug-outs near the orchards; and the cook-houses and the men and the wagons made the devastated village of La Prunelle seem as jolly and gay as Bond Street in the season.

Mr. Brown rode back with the empty wagons to his own village of St. Fernand feeling as merry and light-hearted as possible. This wonderful short cut to brigade headquarters crowned his felicity. He counted the immense gains of it. Instead of going three miles to St. Fernand and four miles on to Graviercourt, one mile and a half straight across; three miles for the return journey, instead of fourteen; no change of horses now required—hours saved, labor saved, everything saved.

He had occasion to avail himself of the short cut no later than the next day. When he arrived with the rations he found that a job was waiting for him.

"Hullo, Brown," said the adjutant, coming up from the signals dug-out with a telegram in his

hand; "eighty thousand rounds of small arms ammunition for you to draw from brigade."

Mr. Brown considered the case with Napoleonic thoroughness and decision. He had seven wagons here. He would send two wagons home in charge of his sergeant and use five wagons for the ammunition. That would mean sixteen boxes to each wagon, a nice light load; it was advisable to go light, because the muddy parts of the track would be a stiff pull for the horses. He gave his orders accordingly, and as soon as the five wagons were empty he set forth.

Dusk was falling, and it seemed already almost dark as the small convoy passed between the trees in the lane by the ruins of the old Gendarmerie; but as soon as they reached the open it was comparatively light again, the whole plain visible yet colorless, all ghost-like and gray. Mr. Brown rode on, watching the roadway on his right. One seemed to be so big on horseback that it was more than ever difficult to remember that the enemy could not see one. Now and then he looked back over his shoulder to make sure that all was right behind him. The wagon wheels and horses' hoofs made no sound on the soft ground. He had allowed the brakesmen to ride in the rear portions

of the limbers, and, looking back, he counted them—five drivers, five brakesmen; all correct.

Glancing back like this, when they had reached a point farther than the limit of his reconnoitering walk of yesterday, he was surprised by seeing the foremost driver turn his head and make a solemn salute with his whip.

"What are you doing that for?"

"Only those graves, sir," said the driver, pointing with his whip.

"Quite right," said Mr. Brown. "Yes, by Jove—our own regiment." And in a loud voice he gave the order, "Ride at attention;" and then "Eyes—left!" himself solemnly saluting, as he rode past the two poor lonely graves.

They were side by side, twenty yards to the left of the track, grown over by the rank weeds, but with the two wooden crosses intact; and, looking straight at them, each driver and brakesman solemnly saluted as he passed by.

"Eyes—front;" said Mr. Brown, and they all went noiselessly on their way.

He had gone a little farther when two soldiers stepped into the track ahead of him and signaled to him to stop. He halted the wagons and rode forward, expecting to find that the men were gunners and that they had something to do with

the new howitzer installation; but they were infantrymen, and he guessed even before they spoke to him that they were orderlies from the brigade office.

"We are to tell you to turn back, sir."

"Why?"

"Not safe, sir."

"But my orders," said Mr. Brown, rather petulantly, "are that it is safe. The brigade told me to come this way."

"Not safe to-day, sir. We are to stop you."

"Oh, curse!" said Mr. Brown, turning to his horse; and he bellowed the order for the wagons to reverse.

They all came round, and he trotted to the head of his convoy, and they began to plod back toward La Prunelle. Then, like a young officer, he doubted; thinking that perhaps he had been wrong to take such a direction without further inquiry. Those chaps were sent from the brigade, but he ought to have made sure of it—he ought to have made sure that the message was really for him, and not for somebody else. He halted his wagons and looked round; but the men had disappeared. They had no doubt gone along the track toward the brigade, and he thought he would ride after them and question them further.

Then he changed his mind again, gave the order, "Walk—march!" and rode moodily, feeling much aggrieved.

Two extra miles added to fourteen make sixteen miles. "Oh, curse!"

Three minutes later the enemy's guns opened, and he and his drivers heard for the first time the noise of a brisk bombardment. It seemed to them quite terrific; and, although the shell-bursts were a mile away, they seemed to be close behind them. They were sending over high explosives, real big stuff. Already it was so dark that one saw the gun flashes lighting up the sky over there; then you heard the bang of the guns, and at the same time, as it seemed, there came the appalling crump of the exploded shell over here. Crump and crump again. Crash after crash—they must be hitting the track, they must be knocking Graviercourt to smithereens. Mr. Brown wondered if he would see flames behind him when he reached higher ground; he wondered if this was what is termed "drum fire"; he wondered if the enemy was searching for those howitzers in the Graviercourt orchards; he wondered if the search would presently shift this way. Both he and his drivers were using their legs conscientiously, and all the horses were walking up to their bits.

The noise continued until they had gone through La Prunelle and were on the high road back to St. Fernand, and then all fell silent. It became as dark as pitch; one could hardly see the road after they had changed horses and were out again on their way to Graviercourt. The journey seemed interminable, but Mr. Brown did not mind the length or the fatigue of it; he remembered that proverb about the longest way round being sometimes the shortest cut; and he thought with a glow of kindly feeling what luck it is to have a topping brigade staff. They were always taking care of one; they never forgot one. But for their warning, he and his whole bag of tricks would have been caught.

After the darkness of the roads the candle-light in the brigade office dazzled one and made one blink. The office, although it was only a superior sort of outhouse at a farm, seemed very snug and comfortable, with its chairs and tables, the long counter for maps, the two red-hatted officers and the other plain-hatted officers, busy at work, but smoking their pipes.

Lieutenant Brown went to the staff captain's table and reported himself.

"I'm to draw eighty thousand rounds S.A.A.," and he put down his copy of the telegram.

"Hullo, Brown," said the brigade-major, looking up from his work and speaking cheerily. "Then here you are, all right! I was getting quite nervous about you. Do you happen to know that those dogs put down a barrage on our track this afternoon?"

"Yes, sir; but I got your message."

"What message?"

"Not to come that way."

"Who said that?"

"Your two orderlies, sir."

"What orderlies?"

The brigade-major got up smiling, went and stood warming himself at the stove, and asked more questions.

"Which of our orderlies?"

"I can't say, sir. I didn't know them. They were both of them Fusiliers."

"Fusiliers! Two of your own fellows?"

"No, sir, they didn't belong to our battalion, because they were wearing the old equipment."

"How did you know they were Fusiliers?"

"I saw their cap badges."

"Then they must have been your own lot. We have no Fusiliers here. Yours are the only

Fusiliers in the brigade. Did they say they came from here?"

"No, sir—but I took it for granted, when they gave the message."

"You say the message was to stop you coming across?"

"Yes, sir—to-day. They said it wasn't safe to-day."

The brigade-major laughed heartily; everybody in the office was looking at Mr. Brown and smiling.

"Look here, Brown, you must come into the mess and have a whisky and soda. I think you have taken a nap in your saddle and been dreaming. . . . You young fellows are really wonderful. Don't you see? How the devil could the brigade send such a message? No one but the Germans were in a position to send such a message. *We* didn't know that the blighters were going to shell the place."

Lieutenant Brown said no more. He recalled the general's quotation: "And still keep something to yourself you will not tell to any."

His mind had suddenly been invaded by a strange thought. He thought of two unknown comrades, awakening from their sleep and rising at the sound of his voice as he passed by. He believed that it was the two dead men in those

graves who had come out to warn them—because they had saluted, because they belonged to the regiment, because they were newcomers whose lives must not be thrown away uselessly, but saved for the great cause.

WHAT EDIE REGRETTED

ALTHOUGH it seemed to go so slowly out there, the war became more and more of a rush for people over here in England. You could see it in their faces. They were trying to do too much. Many of them were getting rattled—especially some of the girls.

Her aunt used to plead with Edie to slacken the pace.

"How *can* I?" said Edie, shrugging her pretty shoulders. "It'll be time enough to rest when peace is declared."

"You'll be dead before then, if you aren't careful;" and Mrs. Parkes languidly buttoned her gloves, yawned, and looked at the set of her hat in the glass. "Take the evening off, anyhow."

"Impossible. There's the meeting at the Broughtons'. They can't get on without me."

"Well, I hope next week will be quieter."

"No, it'll be worse than ever. Flag days every day except Saturday—and Saturday's the Masque."

Mrs. Parkes sighed. "Oh, well, I know *I'm* worn out for one. I doubt if I shall even be up to a

game of bridge after dinner—yet nothing rests me more than that.”

And Mrs. Parkes went off to her club. She and her favorite niece, Edie, ran a joint household in a small flat close to Earl's Court Station. When you are actively engaged on war work of a multiform character your strategical position is of great importance; you must be somewhere from which you can strike in any direction where effort may be required. Earl's Court was an ideal jumping-off place. Edie could throw herself into a District train and bob up at Westminster, all among the Government offices, House of Commons, and so on; she could snatch her basket of flags, dive deeper for the Tube, and in less than no time be outside the Ritz Hotel, saying, “No, I really can't let you off. You must have one;” there was nothing that she could not do from Earl's Court.

She could even go to East Putney, to keep in touch with Mrs. Grange, Jack's mother. And she thought now, with a sigh that was like a graceful little echo of auntie's plaintive gasping, how remiss she might seem in not having gone of late. Somehow or other she must *make* time to do it. It was wrong to neglect her future mother-in-law.

She ran a slender hand across her fair hair,

puckered her white forehead with a frown, and allowed her large blue eyes to take the soft wistful vagueness of expression that is caused by momentary regret. Then she shook herself, making her bangles tinkle, and in a fussy, agitated manner sat down at the imitation Sheraton writing-desk. But before attacking work she looked again at a letter from her sweetheart. It was addressed to his mother, not to her; and Mrs. Grange had kindly sent it on this morning for her perusal, with the marginal note: "Can you understand Jack's hint?"

"Do not be surprised," wrote Jack to his mother, "if I give you a little surprise. I will say no more now, because there is many a slip between the cup and the lip."

Edie had guessed what he meant, and she hoped that her guess would prove correct. The military cross! They were going to give him the cross. Bless his brave heart—she knew how well he deserved it.

The clock outside in the hall struck six, and Edie started guiltily, as though feeling that she had wasted one or two precious moments. This July day had been hot and airless, and now it was the sort of evening on which even the scrawling of a note seems an immense labor. She stared

despairingly at her desk, which was in an indescribable state of confusion, and with nervous fingers rummaged among the mass of documents—tradesmen's bills, ball programs, leaflets of wholesome propaganda, what not. Here was the agenda paper of the Broughtons' meeting. That, at least, must be firmly tackled. When you are going to a meeting, your position is so much stronger if you know what the meeting is about.

But a strange reluctance prevented her for a little from studying the dull sheet, and she sat musing about her lover and herself. Judging merely by her outward aspect as she sat thus, if one had not known, one might easily have mistaken her for a rather feather-headed young lady who was fonder of fuss and chatter than real work; but inwardly all her thoughts were grand and fine. She thought of how the war had not only turned the world upside down, but had changed people's characters, drawing forth from their depths unexpected powers, undreamed of qualities. Her own case—as an example. Looking back at herself as she was before the war, she could not recognize that old self. She had been frivolous, fond of pleasure, shallow—or, at any rate, without high aims and the ability to concentrate her attention on them. Then,

profoundly stirred, she had thrown herself into the war, had given herself to the great cause. She had wanted to do anything, however humble, for the cause; and she had found that there was scarcely anything that she could not do. She did research work in books of reference like *Who's Who*, making out lists of people to whom circulars should be sent; she addressed envelopes by the thousand; she visited the dear Tommies' canteens at the railway stations; she belonged to leagues; she rode remounts sometimes in Hyde Park; she sat on committees. Everybody turned to her for advice and support. "Miss Parkes is so helpful"—it had almost become a proverb. No charity matinée was complete without her. She did not act, or sing, or dance; but she sold programs, was helpful, took an interest. If any one had told her before the tragic test began that she had these latent powers in her, she simply would not have believed it. But truly we have all been put through the furnace, the fires have searched us, the bad metal is fast falling away from the good.

Her eyes grew moist as this fine thought came to her—the thought about the vast war-furnace. She brushed away what might have been tears, had they been allowed to mature; and she thought of her great love for Jack. Perhaps that had been

largely instrumental in steadying her, lifting her, sustaining her on the higher plane. And she thought of how completely the terrific facts of the war had killed the shams and pretenses of modern life. Snobbishness, for instance. Thank heavens, *that* has been blown from our midst for ever.

She thought of Jack's military cross. How proud she would feel, going about with him when he was wearing the blue and white ribbon. During his last leave she herself had felt the want of it. At restaurants, when other girls came in with young men whose tunics sported this decoration, she had felt that poor old Jack looked only half dressed; and it seemed to her that the other girls gave themselves airs and carried their heads defiantly because of the deficiency in Jack's costume. She thought there was nothing on earth that she would like so much as for Jack to get the military cross—except, of course, the red tabs and red hat of a staff officer. How that little bit of red lights up a uniform, what a style it gives to all who carry it—to all who go to restaurants with it! Such a little thing, and yet it conveys so much; recognized social position, influence, membership of the ruling class.

The electric bell rang noisily, the maid went to

the outer door of the flat; and Miss Parkes sprang from her chair and leaped into the tiny hall, Incredible as it seemed, she had heard the sound of the loved voice.

"Jack!"

"Edie!"

They came back into the drawing-room embracing each other; and the maid shut the door behind them, smiling sympathetically.

"Let me look at you."

"Yes, but let me look at *you*."

And for a moment they unlinked themselves, and then began again. He was splendid in his war-stained uniform, at once such a boy and such a man; so sunburnt, strong, alive and alert, so everything he ought to be. She had glanced instinctively at the space above the left breast pocket of his tunic. It was not there; so she said nothing about it for the moment.

"How long have you got?"

"Only eight days. Worse luck."

She turned to the big calendar by the telephone on the writing-table.

"That means you go back on the Sunday?"

"Yes, first thing in the morning."

"When did you arrive?"

"Now, this minute. I have come straight here."

Edie, don't say you're engaged. You'll give me the evening?"

"My dear boy, of course I *must*. It means chucking over an important meeting and upsetting a lot of friends. But everything must stand aside for the man from the trenches;" and she went over to the telephone, and called for the Broughtons' number.

"I see you have had that moved in here," he said, fondly following her.

"Yes, I get busier every day. It meant dancing out into the hall every two minutes. Some days I do half my work on the telephone."

When she had given her apologetic message to the Broughtons' butler she decided how the evening was to be passed.

"This is what we'll do, Jack—dine quietly at the Baveno——"

"But, I say, could I go out to dinner like this?"

"Of course. You can go about just how you please—there are no rules for heroes. Besides, nobody who matters ever goes to the Baveno. It's absolutely quiet and humdrum. Then after dinner we'll do a play. Now, while I get my hat, you ring up a theater and book the seats—dress circle."

"Which theater?" said Jack doubtfully.

Edie thought deeply. "His Majesty's. *Chu Chin Chow*."

"What, again? We have been to that every leave. Isn't there anything new?"

"You wouldn't get seats for the new things. Remember, last time, you liked *Chu Chin Chow* better than you used to. And to me it's always so restful—it takes one's mind off. And they have introduced some wonderful oriental costumes."

"Edie." Jack spoke hesitatingly. "I haven't been home yet. I came straight here."

"So you said. Are you thinking whether your mother will be huffy if I take possession of you for your first evening?"

"Well, what I was really thinking—till you mapped it out—was that I rather hoped to get you—to tempt you—to come back with me to Putney and dine there."

"My dear boy, I shouldn't get a word with you. The family would swamp you."

"No, directly after dinner, we could go out for a stroll, all alone. The mater would know we wanted to be together."

"Oh, I think—I *do* think Mrs. Grange must spare you to me this one evening. Jack, when we get to the Baveno I'll show you my list of en-

gagements, and you'll see for yourself that it's going to be terribly difficult to fit things in. Telephone to Putney to say you are safe and sound. Where did you leave your kit?"

"Down-stairs, with the hall porter—all I have brought."

"Very well. You'll see me home here, pick up your things, and be back with the family circle by eleven o'clock."

It was glorious to be riding in a taxi-cab with her, holding her hand, watching her pretty face, and subconsciously drawing delight from the brightness and gaiety of the London streets. It was rapture to be seated at a little table with her at the restaurant, listening to the band, hearing her voice mingle with it and make the music sweeter. To any one fresh from the line in front of Poperinghe, it really was heaven, all of it.

"Jack," she said, over their coffee and cigarettes, "what was the meaning of the cryptic phrase in your letter to Mrs. Grange, about a surprise? What was to be the little surprise?"

"Why, this, of course. My getting leave."

"Oh, I see. How stupid of me."

"I knew I was ripe for it—that directly leave opened again my chance would come—but I didn't want to say anything definite. It's always so

uncertain out there. However, Jenkins—he's adjutant now, you know—Jenkins said I was third on the list. Then, quite unexpectedly, he called to me from the steps of his dug-out. Edie, I must tell you about it, because it's so funny how things always seem to happen out there. I was thinking just then that——"

"Yes, dear. You must tell me about it at the theater. It's such bad form interrupting and disturbing people. We shall be late if we don't get off at once."

After this it was *Chu Chin Chow* for hours and hours; then great luck in securing a taxi, and more rapture of holding hands; and then five minutes of highest heaven up-stairs at the Earl's Court flat. Huggings, vowings, delirious vaporings—till Mrs. Parkes returned from her club, and broke it up.

Eight days was an immense time out there, but it went very fast over here. And now on his last afternoon he had the feeling that, short as his leave had seemed to him, it had seemed too long for his friends. He was quite at a loose end, with nothing better to do than walk about the streets alone. People were all working so hard for the

war that they had no leisure to spend with any one who was taking a holiday from the war.

Fate had been unkind in depriving him of his sweetheart's company to-day of all days.

Edie herself had been mentally perturbed and emotionally distressed about it. She had intended for a little while to sacrifice herself, to give up her own treat and have what would have been a treat for him instead; she had considered the case, weighing the for and the against, and in the end she simply could not do it. Thinking of it, forcibly dragged one way by her own natural inclination, feebly pulled the other way by her genuine tenderness for Jack, she recognized plainly that the charity matinée was in truth a treat, and not just war duty.

It was a very special affair. It was the hundredth matinée promoted by Edie's favorite league. The main part of it was called *The Masque of Many Nations*, and in this nearly all the pretty women of London would figure. A certain percentage of the very prettiest women had been wisely reserved for the front of the house, as program sellers, in specially designed costumes; and prominent among them would be Edie. Over and above the Masque there was to be a variety entertainment. A famous music-hall

artist was going to sell a pig at auction; royal princesses were to be present; if possible, members of the war cabinet would attend. Twelve of the program sellers, including Edie, would each be entrusted with a signed photograph of Mr. Lloyd George to dispose of to the best advantage. This created a pleasant rivalry among the twelve. At the dress rehearsal there had been great fun and excitement, and a tremendous discussion concerning the special costumes of the program sellers. Some people said the bodices had been cut too low at the back, for daylight; others said that you couldn't cut bodices too low nowadays; and the organizing committee decided that anyhow it was too late to attempt modifications. All this added to the flutter of one's nerves, kept one on wires, made one so apprehensive of the slightest failure and so desperately anxious that in the smallest detail the whole thing should be a triumphant success. It had been so largely advertised and loudly talked of; the world was on tiptoe, expecting it to go off with a bang. No, Edie simply could not give it up; and yet, on the other hand, as she said herself, she felt bad about deserting Jack on his last afternoon. However, they had seen a good lot of each other; and he would soon be here again. Leave is fairly regular.

He was very nice about it, when she explained everything. This was when he called at the flat on Saturday morning.

"It would be no use your coming to the show—merely waste of money, even if you could get in; for I shouldn't have a word with you."

Then she had a bright idea, which seemed a gleam of hope for Jack. The evening? And she made a further explanation. There was to be a dinner after the matinée, in a large, specially retained room of a popular restaurant—a sort of informal feast for all connected with the charity, by way of celebrating the success of the league's hundredth effort; and after dinner there might be, probably, well, almost certainly, a little dancing.

"Jack, I don't see why you shouldn't come to that. Yes, do."

Jack's hope faded again. He must spend the evening at home; his mother had made a point of it; she had hoped that he would bring Edie back with him for dinner.

"Then this," he said, "means that it is good-by now? I shan't see you again?"

"I'm afraid not," said Edie. "What time do you push off to-morrow?"

"Oh, very early—far too early for you to come to the station."

It seemed the longest afternoon of his life. He called at new service clubs to which other young officers of the new armies belonged, but he failed to find any one he knew. Throughout the afternoon he did not meet a single pal. He sat for a considerable time at a tea-shop near Piccadilly Circus, and tried to talk to the tea-girl who waited on him; but she was too busy for conversation. He walked more than half of the way home to Putney, and his spirits sank as he plodded along. Piccadilly was full of people, Hyde Park was crowded, too; the sun shone; everywhere he saw gaiety, brightness, light-heartedness. It was a mistake to suppose that there were no holiday-makers left. And he thought rather morbidly of all the busy war workers, wondering if some of them got their recreation and amusement out of the work itself, not really taking the war seriously, but rather making a plaything of it—because playthings were all that they had ever understood or desired.

Such morbid fancies vanished on the morrow. His spirits rose directly he got back to France. He was all right out there, knowing what was what, and who was who.

He wrote to Edie in quite simple language, but with so much love that she treasured his letter

greatly; not tearing it up, but putting it in the emptiest drawer of her writing-table. He told her how dreadful that last afternoon was to him; how he wandered about alone, feeling utterly wretched because she was not with him. "Well, now, my darling Edie, this is not *grouching*; for you were quite right to keep your engagement with your friends. It is only to let you know how dreadfully fond of you I am. When I am with you I never seem able to tell you. You are so much too good for me. I know that. But perhaps one day I may be more worthy of you."

Not long after the receipt of this letter she was reading a letter from his colonel, addressed to Mrs. Grange. Jack's fourteen-year-old sister Daphne brought it one morning, when Edie was still in bed.

"I am to wait and take it back," said Daphne, "because mother wants Aunt Loo to see it as soon as possible. Mother fainted when she got the news. Father went to the office as usual, but he will try to come back early."

Edie sat up in the bed, shivering and sobbing as she read the letter. "He had endeared himself to all——" Commanding officers should be forgiven if they repeated themselves in these letters;

they had so many of them to write. "By his unfailing cheerfulness and high sense of duty he never failed in setting a good example, and I can assure you he will be missed by all."

"Don't cry, Edie," said young Daphne, very bravely. "One—one oughtn't to re—regret——" and she, poor child, began to sob again herself.

What Edie regretted was that last afternoon of his leave. She regretted that she had not spent it with him; she regretted her refusal to dine with him at Putney; she regretted that she did not go to see him off. All this Edie regretted—very bitterly at first.

THE WRONG DIRECTION

THE battalion had been back in the line for thirty-six hours, and things had happened all the time.

An hour after their arrival Private Henderson had gone out as one of a patrolling party, which caught it heavily from machine-gun fire, got three killed and two winged, and came back with one of these missing. Another party was going out to look for him, when the bombardment opened. Very big and nasty stuff came over, rapidly causing casualties. And off and on the enemy continued to plaster them—fire trench, support trench, communication trenches. The dug-out used for company headquarters was blown in, and Private Henderson with others was turned out for necessary digging to extricate people buried alive. Some hours later he himself got buried with four men crouching in a slit for shelter. He was the least buried of this little lot and emerged uninjured, with mouth, ears, eyes full of earth, but nothing wrong except a pain in the chest. Two of his pals were less fortunate, being for some reason dead. Then the gas shells began to burst, and

there were more casualties among the clumsy or the slow. Box respirators were worn without a breather for four hours, and when the order came to take them off many were sick and fainted. But the enemy's artillery showed no real signs of weariness. It was always beginning once more when you thought it had finished. One lost all count of the time, night and day seemed just the same. It was morning again, and a most awful crump wrecked the trench in which a carrying party was bringing up breakfast for Henderson's platoon. Six men were killed, and the platoon missed its hot tea. The front trench danced under the explosions, timbers fell out of the sky, no shelter was possible. So it went on—no proper food, no sleep, no nothing for thirty-six hours—simply hell.

You had only to look at the company to see what they had gone through. Private Henderson felt more dead than alive. The only mitigation of their misery was that the weather held fine. They had not suffered from cold or wet; and the kind May sun now shining on their haggard, unshaven, dirty faces seemed like a sympathetic caress. It was half past ten A. M., and a dinner of bully beef and biscuits was served out. Water might be expected shortly.

Lieutenant Ashmore spoke to Henderson in the support trench, and at first Henderson could not understand. He was still so dizzy and rattled.

Disasters never come singly. It appeared that Lieutenant Ashmore had broken his pince-nez and mislaid his reserve pair. He had this second pair safe and sound a few days ago, and he thought he must have left them in the hut down at St. Grégoire, occupied by him and other officers till the battalion came up. He was saying that he wanted Henderson to go down there and look for them.

"Yes, sir, I see. I'll do it, sir," said Henderson. "You trust me, sir."

Also Henderson was to find out at St. Grégoire if Captain Berkeley had returned. Captain Berkeley was due from leave last night.

"All right, sir. I'll do it," said Henderson.

And Lieutenant Ashmore gave him the most exact description of the particular hut—the fourth on your right hand as you came into the field from the railway line, and the lieutenant's valise had lain at the far end of the hut. The glasses were in a black leather case. The case might have slipped down between the boards.

"I'll find 'em if they're there, sir. But didn't I ought to have a pass, sir?—or the p'lice may stop me."

Lieutenant Ashmore brought out his pocket-book, scrawled a few words in pencil, and Private Henderson noticed his hand shaking. Everybody was a bit shaky this morning. Nobody seemed quite to know what he was doing.

"There you are," and he tore the leaf from his pocketbook.

"You 'aven't put the date, sir."

"All right. What is the date? Damn, I don't know what day it is;" and the lieutenant added a hieroglyphic that might mean anything.

Henderson went to the crumbling lair that in happier circumstances should have served him as a sleeping bunk, fished out his pack and equipment, and put on everything, murmuring to himself the while. "Lose me kit next. Get that buried too. Best take it, 'eavy or not." Then in another minute he had engaged in the long series of communicating trenches that led one away from all this danger and beastliness toward places of comparative safety. No one had questioned him; no one took the slightest notice of him.

He was a pitiable figure really, as he shambled and stumbled along the boards of the deep trench, round the incessant traverses, and through tunnels that had timbered roofs; with his pack catching against the uprights of the revetment and giving

him such jolts that he nearly fell; looking small, weak, tired, overburdened, altogether outmatched by the tremendous phenomena of this abominable war. His face was still covered with reddish brown earth, his hair was full of earth, his clothes were earth-stained. Down here, with sunlight, tufts of green grass, and moving air three or four feet above his head, he seemed like a creature of another race, an earthman painfully emerging toward the surface from the depth below. But in truth he felt quite happy, happier every moment; the sense of fatigue passed from him; the pain in his chest had gone. He was getting an unexpected and delightful treat. Just to come out of it for an hour or two, to enjoy a brief respite from the hateful noise and the senseless fury of it, would do him, was doing him, all the good in the world. He dined as he trudged along, and when he had pushed the last bite of tinned beef into his mouth and cracked his last bit of biscuit he whistled.

"Oh, cuss!"

Something else had whistled, high over his head, and there came a tremendous crump that seemed straight in front of him, perhaps fifty yards down the trench. He leaned against the side of the trench, trembling violently, and small

fragments of earth fell tinkling on his metal hat. Then there came three more bursts, and he dropped upon all fours on the duck boards.

"If they're going to shell me between 'ere an' the village," he thought, "that puts the lid on it." Then he got up, pulled himself together. "What I bin through 'as awmost unnerved me;" and he went on a little way, clambered up a bay in the side of the trench, and took a bold survey.

Some of the ugly smoke was still visible, but incredibly farther off than where he had looked for it; otherwise all was deliciously peaceful and innocent, the rank grass and flowering weeds all bright in the sunshine, here where no man's foot trod, and right ahead the white ruins and the tall blackened trees that were all that remained of the village.

After about a mile he came out of the trench upon a dusty bit of road. This was the road used by the regimental transport at night when it brought up the rations; parallel to it there ran a deep railway cutting, with the permanent way all dismantled, even the sleepers gone—the telegraph poles down, and the iron signal posts uprooted and trailing. Thence onward down the road one passed through the customary scene of destruction. The road itself meandered among shell-

holes, many of them recent; everything that could be broken had long since been smashed to smithereens; not a leaf had unfolded itself this year on the shattered trees; and the village, when he came to it, was simply a rubbish heap of bricks, stones and tiles. But through it, constructed of its waste materials, there were excellent good roads, along which lorries, cars, and horse-drawn wagons moved fast or sedately; some fine water troughs with an in and out track had been erected; all among the ruins one saw shelters and huts, such as the divisional canteen, town major's office, salvage officer's store, and so on; and on the far side, in what had once been green fields, there were the permanent wooden huts, camouflaged tents, and brown canvas bivouac sheets which showed that many battalions of infantry were reposing themselves. Still farther off the bare brown valley was full of horse lines of artillery, camps of A.S.C., dumps of Royal Engineers; and from the distant ridges our bigger guns roared cheerfully, with a flash that was just perceptible now and then, when clouds obscured the sun. Nothing uglier, more unnatural than the whole view could well be imagined; and yet to Private Henderson it was refreshing in its smiling orderliness and peaceful organization. By contrast with

the front trenches and what he had come from, it had the penetrating charm of an exquisite piece of pastoral verse and it stirred him to his depths.

"Bit o' luck, this errand. Feel the better for it a'ready."

Near the water troughs he was pounced upon by a corporal of the military police, who made him show his pass.

"'Pass Private Henderson on duty,'" the corporal read out aloud; and he said that the name of unit, regimental number, and a lot more ought to have been written down. "It's made out very irregular."

"It was written up in the line," said Henderson, with an aggrieved tone.

"Yes, and I tell you the whole thing's very irregular. Up in the line—that's you chaps' proper place, and I don't understand officers sending men down out of it on any pretense whatever. You just tell me again what your duty is."

And Henderson told him.

"All right, my lad, and you do it then; and get back to your battalion as fast as you can."

Henderson trudged on, feeling aggrieved. "Blasted M.P.'s—they take jolly good care to keep safe out of it themselves, and tell you to 'urry back there." And he thought of the military

police, both mounted and on foot, as the infantryman's deadly foes, more treacherous, conscienceless, and more powerful than the Germans; dogging you on the march, lying in ambush to trip you up, entangling you with unpublished regulations. "So many lawyers and magistrates—that's what they ought to 'a' bin, not soldiers."

A strange battalion was occupying the huts in the field where his own lot had lain; and he made a long and conscientious hunt for Mr. Ashmore's glasses, but without avail. Some good-natured officers helped him, but all their search was fruitless. Nor could he obtain any tidings of Captain Berkeley. On the advice of the kind officers he went to the Armstrong hut labeled "Town Major," and inquired there. But Captain Berkeley had not been heard of.

"Awright. Then I best go back meself, and so report."

But the idea came to him that first he would look in at the battalion transport lines, and he did so. Perhaps the captain or the pince-nez might have turned up there. Henderson had pals among the drivers.

The transport lines were idyllic in the soft afternoon light, just a perfect picture of restful-

ness and ease; a few barkless trees to which the picket lines were attached, all the animals lazily swishing their tails, the men all sitting or standing by a black ditch hanging the cleaned harness on the wire fence, rubbing their bits and chains on the dry earth to polish them, smoking, whistling, chaffing; the transport sergeant asleep under a wagon sheet that spread like a canopy on sticks over the hay bales and oats bags; and the limbered wagons and four traveling kitchens parked so as to form a comfortable background to the whole little happy family.

"Cheerio!" said Henderson, in a confidentially quiet greeting, so as not to disturb the sergeant.

The transport welcomed him charmingly as soon as they recognized him through his dirt, and promptly he gave himself what he called "the luckserry" of a thorough clean-up. "Don't sim worth it," he said; "but it *is* such a luckserry." So they lent him a bucket to wash in, helped to brush his clothes and get the earth out of his hair; he had his shaving tackle in the pack, and after shaving he stepped forth radiant. One could see then exactly what he was—a rather silly-looking man of thirty-three, with watery blue eyes, a feeble chin, and a mustache that would have drooped and straggled if it had not been severely

pruned into the military Charley Chaplin pattern. Before the war he had been a milkman at Norwood and he spoke now precisely as he used to speak on his round to cooks and kitchen-maids, his eyes very wide open, but blinking spasmodically, as he related marvelous events that he had just read in the newspaper.

"Bad up there, is it, Hendy?"

"I tell you, lads, it's fairly chronic. I never seen anything like it, and I seen a bit in me time. Sergeant Hulk—you won't never see him again; no, nor Jack Yates nor Hackett nor Price. Mr. Bevill, he's killed outright. Both Mr. Cooper and Mr. Crane 'as been 'it—severe. The losses has been something fearful. I reckon when the lists come to be made out, arf the comp'ny's gone. I don't envy you your trip this evenin'—and that's straight."

They asked him to stay to tea, but he said no, time forbade; he must get back to the battalion. Then he relented. Tea was almost ready; the chimney of one of the traveling kitchens was sending up smoke; men were carrying dixies. Presently he was having a glorious tea. He sat with his back to a wagon wheel, drinking the sweet, strong, boiling hot tea, devouring immense pieces of bread and jam, feeling absolutely happy.

"You transport do yourselves all right, what! An' I don't blame you. Eat and drink while you may, for when you can't who shall say?" And he laughed and blinked, glad to have made the others laugh by this witty quotation.

He ingratiated himself with the transport sergeant by a graceful compliment.

"If I may venture to say so, Sergeant, your mules look in the prime of their condition. It's a pleasure to regard them."

And after tea the sergeant did the honors of the lines, taking him up and down behind the animals' tails; the sergeant patting favorite brutes on their hindquarters, even toying with their tails, while Henderson kept at a respectful distance but went on admiring all through the promenade.

"But I must be getting back;" and he began to put on his equipment.

"Come up with us and the wagons."

"No, I mustn't wait for that . . . So long, boys." And, shouldering his rifle, he set out.

Soon he had left the happy village behind, and he was trudging up the long road, with the railway cutting at its side. When he got near the beginning of the communication trench he halted. He looked down the steps into it, and thought of

all that those infernal duck-boards would lead him to. And suddenly an invisible distaste possessed him. It was not fear; it was not merely fatigue; it was a crisis of overwhelming disgust and disinclination. If he had been marching up with his platoon he would have felt none of it; but because he was utterly alone, with no one to give him an order or set him an example, he could not resist it.

Next moment he was slithering down the steep bank of the railway cutting. He climbed up the opposite bank, came out on the weedy, shell-marked plain, and stumbled along, with his back to the whole system of trenches. "But this won't do," he muttered feebly. "I want to get back to my battalion." Nevertheless he continued to trudge on, in the wrong direction; keeping to the high ground, avoiding the valleys, with the low rays of the setting sun on his face, and the gigantic, fantastic shadow of a fully equipped infantryman trailing after him as he crossed each patch of bare ground.

Not far from a little wood he unharnessed himself from his kit and lay down to sleep. When he woke it was daylight again, and the sun had just risen, a long way off, over the German trenches. He sat up, feeling headachy and

stupid, and it took him a little while to get his bearings and to realize that this was to-morrow morning.

"By gosh," he thought, "I must get back to the battalion precious quick now, or I shall fairly catch it."

He stood, shading his eyes with his hand, staring eastward at the place of duty and torment. He had drifted an enormous distance from it already. And soon he was drifting on again, still in the wrong direction.

On all sides he was surrounded by the British Army, but it was the zone of divisions in support, divisions in reserve, departmental troops, and so forth. A mile to his right there was a large camp, and he saw strings of horses passing across the plateau on their way to water. Except for this, nobody seemed yet stirring. Ahead of him lay green grass, wide fields, and little woods in full foliage. Each wood, as he knew, concealed an inhabited village. It all looked delightful in the fresh morning light. This part of the world had become more familiar to him than Norwood, Tulse Hill, or Sydenham had been in the days before the war; and he thought now of the village of Ligny l'Abbaye: he thought of the village as one of the most charming spots on earth—a little haven

where the battalion had lain sheltered and happy during six weeks of rest. He would go there, look up old friends, and get a mouthful of breakfast. An hour or two later, he came down a lane from the hillside under the pleasant trees among French peasants with farm wagons, round the corner by the church, into the main street. The village, as usual, was occupied by a battalion. Platoons were being dismissed from early parade; the cooks were busy: it was breakfast time. His special friends, Monsieur and Madame Marizot, lived at the small farm at the top of the street, but before he got to them he was pounced upon. It was a slight pounce this time, made by battalion police, not the regular M.P.'s. Asked who he was, and where he was going, he told some cock-and-bull tale of how he had been sent by his officer to collect washing that had been left behind when the unit moved. "Marizot—that's the name," and he pointed. "Lame old chap that limps. Oh, it's all right, I assure you," he said confidently; and they believed him and let him pass. There was something of a foundation to this little tale, because, in fact, Madame Marizot did wash shirts and collars, and he had arranged with her to do so for Captain Berkeley, when for a little while he was acting as servant to that officer. †

Old Marizot, his wife, his daughter Elise, and the children, welcomed Private Henderson with effusion. They made much of him as a valued friend, setting him down to table, and giving him a splendid breakfast in their comfortable kitchen. The farm was overrun by a platoon of the strange battalion, but they did not interfere with the honored guest, and he spent a most restful, happy day there. He could talk no French, and his hosts could talk no English, but nevertheless they seemed to understand each other perfectly, eking out the conversation with gestures, friendly taps and nudges, and much laughter. A little stream divided Marizot's garden from the orchards, and in the warm sunny afternoon Private Henderson had a bath down there, making his toilet very slowly, afterward sitting on the grass with his housewife open at his side, and doing a little stitching and mending. Little Jeanne, aged five, with her brother Eugène, aged four, joined him when he was dressed; and, using his clasp knife with considerable skill, he made a toy boat for the children, which, when launched upon the stream, provided them all three with amusement till supper time.

Next day he tore himself away. His kindly, generous hosts conveyed to him that they would

have been glad if he could stay longer, but by energetic signs—such as shouldering his rifle, aiming at the invisible foe, and so forth—he gave them to understand that he was compelled to leave them and return to the battalion. Then they filled his haversack with provisions for the journey.

Throughout that day he drifted on, always in the wrong direction, keeping to the fields and open places, picnicking on dry banks among dog roses, and quietly musing.

He knew his altered position, his new status, perfectly well. He thought of those things that are read out from time to time on parade. Desertion. Nothing else, of course. How would it read in his case? "Private Henderson tried by field general court-martial for desertion—in that he absented himself from his battalion when in the line—was found at a village in the rear five days subsequently—sentenced to death. Sentence of the court was carried out at 6:45 A. M. on the 24th inst." Something like that, what?

Yet he enjoyed it. The quiet, the peace, the sensation of holiday-making soothed and gladdened him. Above all, he was enjoying the supreme relief after so much effort and strain. It was sufficient for happiness to be here, free, obeying no orders except the impulse of the

moment; eating and drinking when he pleased, sitting down to rest when he pleased, getting up and moving on again when he pleased.

During the course of this long, rambling day—for he rambled purposely, in order to dodge the town of Le Merval, and to keep wide of the large village of Chapelle-aux-Bois—he thought lazily of his whole career, passing in review much of his life as a milkman, and nearly all of his life as a soldier, taking a meditative retrospect, without any method or brain fag. A hard master, Mr. Garrett at the dairy, saying rude things if incensed; accusing Henderson of being half-witted when accidents occurred, and vowing he had no more intellect than a boy of eight. It had been much the same story at first, after he enlisted so gallantly in 1914. He was slow in learning the tricks of his new trade, and the authorities had threatened to draft him out of the army altogether as “wanting in the upper story.” But he had learned it all in time; he had shown himself as good as the best of ’em. “Simply surprisin’ the way I’ve stuck to it,” he thought, with a glow of honest pride. “Three years.” And as though he had been seated at a cinema theater, he saw moving pictures of his life during those interminable three years. Training, crossing the

Channel at night, marching on the straight French roads, fighting, digging trenches; marching again, drilling and training again, as though it was all to begin once more—more fighting, more digging—sleeping out in rain, snow, mud, frost—digging, fighting, marching. “Considerin’ my orig’nal constitution, and my chest measurement, it is simply surprisin’ ’ow well I’ve done.” He had received compliments and recognition, too. And he thought of how he had been a lance corporal, and of how the stripe had been taken away—not for a crime, or any foolishness, but simply from his kindness and good nature in dealing with others. “Didn’t assert himself sufficiently;” that is what the company sergeant-major said, and vividly, as though it had been yesterday, he recalled the little scene in the orderly room, when he was taken before the colonel. He had spoken up with great dignity on that occasion. “If it’s to be said that I have failed in the power of command, I ask it, in justice to myself, to be reverted to the ranks.” “If that is your own wish,” the colonel had replied, “it shall be done. And, in the circumstances, I think it does you credit.” There! That was a compliment from the commanding officer himself,

seated in his orderly room. He had not *lost* his stripe, but had *renounced* it at his own request.

His wife, however, couldn't understand it; nagging at him in her letters, when he told her to drop the title and address him for the future as No. 12561, Private Henderson, No. 14 Platoon, D Company. What a hullabaloo she had set up when he patriotically enrolled himself in August, 1914. "Don't tell me you've done that, James. If you mean to say you're going to run away from your wife and children, I'll never speak to you again. Don't come back here in your uniform, for you'll find the door shut in yer face!" But she grew reconciled to it, and was proud to walk out with him in his uniform. She had her separation allowance, and the extra for the kids, and she got on very well without him. She said so in her letters. Those kids were growing up fast—older than Jeanne and Eugène. He thought of the pride, the affection, and the anxiety of his relatives in following his fortunes as a soldier. Not too much of these emotions, but enough to make them all take it badly if things happened to go wrong. His sister Sue and her husband—a man earning big money in munitions, and consequently rather swollen-headed and uppish—

would be the first to say: "I told you so." They had always belittled him—not being so openly rude as Mr. Garrett, the dairyman—but conveying the same offensive suggestions. "What do you suppose *you're* going to do in the army?" said Sue at the very beginning. "It's big strong men like Jack what's wanted to make soldiers—not little weedy chaps like you."

"Then if Jack, and all such fine fellows, had gone, perhaps I might have consented to stay behind." Had her there, anyhow! But she might get her revenge now.

And again he thought of it. The ugly word and ugly sound of it. Desertion. He tried to forget it altogether, and walked on, still enjoying himself. He felt like a murderer who tries to forget the rope—and he succeeded.

Toward the evening he was following one of the great main roads, a noble thoroughfare, up and down which mechanical traffic flowed in an almost continuous stream. The character of the country had changed; there were more inhabitants, more enclosures, if possible, more camps; and he had been unable to keep to the open. Many troops were on the march; and he himself looked exactly like a man who had dropped out of the

ranks of a battalion moving. He so explained himself when questioned.

"Hullo, my lad! Where are you going?"

"Goin'?" he asked innocently. "Why, I'm wiv me own battalion. They gone by here, haven't they?"

"Then you shove along after them. Don't hang about."

These policemen at barriers and cross-roads were regulating the traffic, averting blocks, cautioning drivers for excessive speed; and they did not bother about infantry, except when called upon to clear the road for a column. They knew that the mounted police who ride at the tail of every brigade could be trusted to drop on any stragglers. "Pass along"—that's what they told him; for all the world as if they had been the metropolitan police in dear old England.

Absolutely unchallenged he passed along through a quiet dignified town that seemed to be army headquarters, or perhaps only headquarters of two or three cavalry divisions. It was full of saddle horses, motor-cars, officers in red hats; and the military police were so busy saluting here that they did not throw him a word. He came out again through all their barriers, and footed it on

the broad westward road, with his face to the red fires of the setting sun.

He found a cozy sleeping-place up against real hay-ricks, and a little after dawn he was chatting with some A.S.C. men in charge of empty lorries. He craved a lift and asked where they were going. "Belong."

"Belong?" He gasped. The sea-coast! Then, receiving permission to do so, he climbed up over the tail-board of a lorry, and sat puffing and blowing. The drivers thought he was a man for leave who had somehow missed the train at rail-head. He looked like a leave man in his service cap, with the steel helmet slung at his shoulder, with pack, respirator, side arm, entrenching tool; and they did not notice that, unlike a leave man, he was without an overcoat.

At the port his real peril began, and he shook with dread. He felt remorse, too. He was like a dreamer awakened. Such a thing had never happened in the battalion; he would be the very first; his name would be remembered and detested forever. When, tremblingly, he had worked his way down through the town and reached the sunlit open spaces by the quay and the bridge, the sight of all the police with their red cap bands

and their arm badges froze his blood. They guarded each end of the bridge; they seemed to be here, there, and everywhere. It was a certainty that he would be nabbed.

He looked about him despairingly. Across the water the town station was like an ugly fortress or prison, and the hotels suggested houses of detention; a black engine and a black sinister train of closed trucks was moving across the roadway to the sound of a melancholy horn; to the right he saw the pier station, trains of ordinary coaches, mail steamers with signal flags flying. Crowds of real leave men were hastening toward the boats; the sun shone with pitiless brightness; and the fresh sea breeze came to him along the quay, salt and clean, with wonderful whispers in it—whispers of freedom, of home, but never a whisper of hope.

He shambled away toward the Folkestone Hotel. He dared not face the town again, and yet he knew that down here by the water was the special danger zone. But he could not keep away from it. Presently he was back near the bridge. A lot of leave men were coming along the quay on this side of the river—in no formation, or order, without officers to direct them, just straggling down from the rest camp to the boats. Instinc-

tively, rather than from any plan, Private Henderson hid himself among these men, crossed the bridge with them unchallenged, and went with them down the other quay toward the pier station and the boats. But his footsteps lagged upon the hard stones. What was he going to do? He had only jumped a little further into the deadly trap. Not a chance of getting safely on the boats, stowing himself away, reaching the other side. Every man's warrant would be examined at the gangway going on, and again when going off.

Suddenly his hair stood on end. He was face to face with Captain Berkeley.

"What are you doing? Leave?"

"Well, sir, I'm looking for *you*—and, thanks be to goodness, I've found you at last."

"What do you mean? Got a letter for me?"

"No, sir. I was sent to find you."

"Who sent you?"

"Mr. Ashmore."

"Where from?"

"The line, sir."

"The line! Well, what is it? What was his message?"

"In the hurry, sir, he gave me no exact message. He just like sent me off, at the double."

"To come right down here to meet the boat?"

"No, sir, to St. Grégoire—first of all. And not seeing you there, I come on—bit by bit—tracing you like."

The officer asked a few more questions, and suspected something very fishy. Then the wretched Henderson confessed, asked to be saved, appealed for mercy. "I don't sim to understand how I done it. I sim to have bin 'arf mad like—not truthfully knowing what I *was* doing." And to give poignancy to the appeal, he reminded Captain Berkeley how he had once acted as his servant. "I done my best for you, sir, that night you was hit. I was a good servant to you, sir."

"No, you were a very bad servant. That's why I sent you back to duty."

"Well, I tried. I *have* tried, sir, all along. I ain't very strong—and the len'th of my service tells on me. But God knows I've tried. Don't let me be disgraced. Don't let the battalion be disgraced through my cause. Take me back with you."

And, right or wrong, Captain Berkeley did it.

Fate, too, was kind to Private Henderson. During his absence the trenches had been knocked about again; Mr. Ashmore had gone, badly wounded; so much had happened that Henderson had been reported as missing only this morning.

They believed his tale that Lieutenant Ashmore had improperly sent him away on a tedious errand, and they asked no questions.

Three weeks later he went over the top among his pals, and was killed with great credit. So it all ended happily, as one may say.

THE CHANGING POINT OF VIEW

WHEN the war broke out, Mr. Veal looked round his little shop with a despairing glance, and cursed the fools who had made this war to ruin him. He was the Whiteley or Selfridge of the village, selling all the things that the villagers wanted without the trouble of going to the market towns to fetch them—on one side of the door, grocery, stationery, tobacco; on the other side, ironmongery, hardware, a certain amount of drapery, every kind of odds and ends—a good stock, and now, in a moment, half of it, three-quarters of it, changed to waste rubbish on his hands.

Mentally he measured the full extent of the disaster. The cavalry regiment at the barracks over the hill would of course go to the war; wives of officers and hangers-on in the little houses along the Salisbury Road would disappear; all the young men from the village would go; the old men and women who remained would be hard up, and their custom would drop to nothing; taxes would rise, agriculture would languish; he might just as well put up the shutters and be done with it.

He was a small, sandy man of forty-five—one of those hard little men of quick brain and inexhaustible physical energy, and he had put twenty years of unceasing work into his business; doing all right, keeping his head above water, but never really thriving—never really getting adequate reward for the severe and sustained effort. In the last year or two, perhaps, his prospects had brightened, and now this was the end of it. Curse the fools, calling themselves statesmen, who had ruined him!

He unfolded the *Daily Mail* on the counter, looked again at the immense head-lines that heralded the upheaval, and would have wept, had not Miss Hames been looking at him. Then, suddenly, his thoughts took a new turn; it was as if a fever that had driven everybody else mad swept from a distance into his veins. As the paper said, this was going to be a tremendous conflict; every man would be wanted for it. Why should he not go himself? And his thoughts worked with astounding rapidity. Business done for; alone in the world, a widower—two daughters married—no one dependent on him. Leave Miss Hames in charge, to carry on and save what she could out of the wreck? Strike a blow for England!

“What is it?” asked Miss Hames.

"Nothing. Go on with your work."

He had startled Miss Hames by standing up behind the counter and slapping his chest. A burst of patriotic ardor was quite carrying him away. Here goes! In imagination he saw it all—marching, fighting, glory, and—death? Well, and he gulped and turned up his eyes, that, too, perhaps; but one need not brood on that. Do it, without a word to anybody, now.

A few minutes afterward he was on his bicycle, pedaling for all he was worth. He arrived at the barracks in a perspiration—very hot, almost burning, both inside and out.

"Well," he cried jovially. "I have rolled up." And he leaned his bicycle against the iron gates of the barrack square. Nobody took any notice of him. There were rows of wagons being loaded; soldiers with strange-looking equipment were moving in all directions; the whole place was changed, full of queer preparations.

"I have rolled up." He said it again to a non-commissioned officer who was passing.

"What say?"

"I have rolled up. Recruit Number One—for the war."

With some little difficulty he prevailed on them to take him to the busy orderly room for an

interview with an officer. They did not exactly laugh at him in the orderly room, but they got rid of him without unnecessary delay. The regiment was full strength—he was absurdly over age—not a rider—and so forth. He had not thought of these things until then. They advised him to go to Salisbury, and make an application at the recruiting office there. He biked back across the hill to the little railway station on the branch line, and an hour and a half afterward arrived at Salisbury. At the recruiting office he was received as if he had come for the purpose of playing an ill-timed joke. It was soldiers that they wanted for the war, not middle-aged grocers. When he said that he would soon pick up the tricks of soldiering, they told him that he was ridiculously too old to learn. Considerably huffed, he said that he would see what the recruiting officer said about it at Winchester or Andover. But he did not try his luck at these other towns; he went home disgusted.

He thought worse of things than ever. If this was the way they started, how could one hope that they would win? You can't fight a war without men; and here, at the very kick-off, they had refused an able-bodied, wiry, well-proportioned man, full of grit and pluck, just because he was a few years over their peace-time age standard.

Meeting the vicar outside the yard where he kept his two carts and horses, he could not refrain from expressing his feelings on the subject.

"Do you mean, Mr. Veal," said the vicar, "that you have really offered your services to the country in this moment of peril?"

"I do," said Mr. Veal, "and they won't have me."

"I'd like to shake hands with you," said the vicar. "You have set an example to everybody."

"Oh, bother that, sir," said Mr. Veal. "I wasn't after compliments. I wanted to do my duty, and it seems they won't let me."

"Mr. Veal," said the vicar, "it was fine of you. There is no other word for it."

And the vicar's sympathy did Mr. Veal a lot of good.

Then, almost immediately, he made the wonderful discovery that, far from ruining him, the war was going to make his fortune. He could sell anything. All you had to do was to buy things—any sort of things—and sell them again at a large profit.

The regular cavalry regiment had gone, but a large reserve regiment had come in its place. Troops of the new formations were pouring into the neighborhood. The hillside, the downs, the whole country for miles and miles, were becoming

one vast camp. Quick to realize possibilities that offered themselves, he threw himself with redoubled energy into the expanding enterprise. He bought stock with Napoleonic boldness; he took the cottages on each side of him at a high rent; he hired sheds, barns, outbuildings, for use as storehouses. In the midst of it, he rubbed his hands and slapped his chest, and said how he would like to go himself.

"But they won't take me—though I dessay I'm as solid as many of the youngsters." He urged every one to go and enlist; acted as amateur recruiting sergeant, as he rushed about the country; sometimes brought in a few recruits in his cart, and saw them off at the station. He saw everybody off, and was full of geniality on the platform; then hurried back to his shop to put the price up again. He told the shop girl who helped him principally: "Those writers' companions at sixpence, what we used to do at twopence, put 'em at ninepence. I don't know when I shall get any more." And just then, perhaps, a Tommy, coming in, asked for one.

"I say, ninepence? It was only sixpence yesterday."

"Yes, my lad, and likely 'twill be a shilling to-morrow. You are lucky to get one at all."

And he used to say, with immense joviality, to the soldiers who caviled at his price: "You seem to forget there's a war on."

It surpassed all dreams. He was expanding so fast that there seemed no limit to the expansion, unless perhaps the want of labor and transport stopped him. These people would buy anything—not only the ignorant soldiers, but the officers, the officers' wives, their servants. Regimental quartermasters and transport officers almost staggered one by their demands. Three hundred balls of string, miles of tape, chaff-cutting machines at twice the pre-war cost.

"Could you possibly get me six more machines by Saturday?"

"I'll do my best, sir. I can't say more."

At night, as he lay in his lonely but comfortable bed, he wished that the war might go on for ever.

Miss Hames was a splendid assistant, and she helped him loyally, knocking into shape the untrained hands that he hastily collected for her, and seeing that they set about it in style. She fretted a little at first, when her sweetheart went, but she was now reconciled. Never did a man have a better right hand, and the thought occurred to him that he would marry her. Couldn't do a wiser thing. Directly he had made

up his mind that it was good business, he saw the romantic side of it also. She had a nice figure, and the good looks that go with health and youth. She was a pleasant companion. Two years of widowerhood is long enough for mourning, especially when the times are moving fast.

He proposed to Miss Nellie Hames, and, in speaking of his glorious prospects, he let out his secret thought. He said that there was nothing that he might not attain to, if the war lasted long enough.

"Oh, heaven forbid!" said the girl.

"Heaven forbid, too," said Mr. Veal. "Well, you think it over. I don't want to influence you, but I wouldn't let the idea of Dick Harford interfere. In this awful conflict, what is the chance of his coming back? That's what I read into this talk about conscription. All the first lot will be wiped out. The government has made up their mind to it, and recognizes the fact."

They were married. And he became more prosperous than ever. The shop and its extensions were crowded with customers all day long, winter and summer. The size of the camps was gigantic; solid huts had been built, and two hospitals had been organized. Wounded soldiers coming in to buy, and hearing the price of things,

used to say, "Spare us, *kamerad!*" and put up their hands facetiously. But he could not spare them—war is war—and they bought just the same. With his wife there in the shop, he could run about over this vast Tom Tiddler's ground, picking up gold and silver. He supplied people with furniture, either on hire or by purchase; he sold bicycles, typewriting machines, ready-made clothes, second-hand motor-cars. He just bought and sold again; it did not matter what.

A child of the marriage was born to them, but unhappily it soon died. He was a little at sea during his wife's illness, but he ran up to the sick-room from time to time during the course of the day, to cheer his poor invalid with news of rapid and fortunate transactions.

When he read about raising the military age, he applauded. "Thirty-five. Jolly good job, too. About time some of these slackers were combed out."

At the second combing, he was as pleased as ever. "Forty. Well, if they're wanted, I say take 'em, and be done with it. But, mind you, it shows how the casualties out there are mounting up, to make it necessary."

He did not really regret the loss of the child, fond as he was of children. Working night and

day, doing one's bit to the best of one's ability, one has not leisure for the softer joys of life. A nursery in war-time is a luxury that good patriots should not crave for.

Nellie felt her sorrow heavily, but the bereavement left her free to return to the shop, and he urged her to do so; it was best for her—no good to sit and mope. "Besides, in these cruel times, one has not the right. We are at war."

At the next come-out and rise of age he became a little anxious. If the war went on long they would get the military age up to, well—something ridiculous. And no sense in taking men over forty-five. How can such men be of any real use? Eye-wash. A trick of the politicians to satisfy the public with a paper army, when they feel the strain upon the army in the field.

One night there was a supper-party at his house—his own nephew from the war on leave, and one or two of the lad's friends; all in uniform, all war veterans; his wife's old sweetheart, Corporal Harford—not killed yet—was among them. Corporal Harford's presence caused no distress to Mrs. Veal, and no uneasiness to her mind. All that old sentiment had been wiped out by the gigantic progress of events; it belonged to the dim past; and the corporal himself seemed to have

forgotten all about it. At any rate, he bore no malice toward anybody, but was as jolly as a sandboy.

"Now then, Nellie," said Mr. Veal, "what about a glass of our special port for these heroes?" and he laughed gaily. He was as cheery as ever, showing to advantage as a host, in this comfortable, well-furnished dining-room; able to drop the cares of business—or, at least, to seem to do so—for an hour's kind fellowship.

"They feed you all right out there?"

"Oh, yes. No complaints."

"Well, I envy you young fellows. Fill your glasses. Here's a health to victory."

And he went on pleasantly, touching on his own position. "We do our bit in our own way, keeping things together, but there's no glamour, no glory for us."

And one of them said, "Oh, your turn will come. Every able-bodied man will be out before it's over."

"So they ought to—the able-bodied ones." And Mr. Veal took another glass of his excellent port. "All say it's a wonderful, healthy life."

"Yes, it'd be healthy enough, if it wasn't for the shells."

"Oh, well, I suppose you take your chance."

"And a precious poor chance it is. Eh, old pal?"
And they all laughed contentedly.

These lads explained how, every year, every month, the war grew worse—more gas, more artillery fire, more hateful new inventions of bombs and mortars. "But when all's said and done," remarked one of them philosophically, "in the end it comes back to the old weapons—the bay'net and the rifle."

"Yes," said another, "it's the hand-to-hand fightin' that wins war, and proves who is really the best man."

"I suppose the bayonet fighting is sharp work," said the host, rather feebly.

"You bet."

And one of them brought in his rifle and side arm, and gave them a demonstration, while they sat at table and watched. "In—out. D'ye see?" Showing them how the bayonet stuck in the enemy's body, if you didn't withdraw it, and giving more and more details—how you kicked your adversary to make him double up, if he was holding your weapon, and hit him with the fist; and they imitated the death grunt of the stuck man—further explaining how you got stuck yourself, if you tripped or fell, or were wounded.

"Oh, come," said Mr. Veal, "ladies present."

But Mrs. Veal begged them to go on, and said she loved it. She was sitting with her arms on the table and her chin in her hands, her eyes bright, and her cheeks glowing, as she watched. "I'd like to think they had stabbed every German out there, and shown no mercy to those who don't know what mercy is."

"Nellie! I didn't imagine you were so blood-thirsty."

"I am thinking of the women and children they have murdered."

"Just so," said Mr. Veal, rallying himself. "*There*, I heartily concur."

It nearly made him sick, this bayonet exercise. He went out into the back yard, feeling all hot and cold, as if he was really going to be ill.

He became thoughtful after this, and he no longer wanted the war to continue indefinitely. He had done well—very well. If necessary, he was ready to retire to-morrow.

As the combing process continued, he took special steps to confirm his position as indispensable and exempt. He obtained testimonials, and a letter to this effect from the general officer commanding a division, saying that, in view of the circumstances, his emporium was absolutely necessary to the comfort of the troops. If the

army didn't want to upset him, that ought to be the end of it. But he also made great friends with the general's lady, who resided with headquarters at a country house two miles from the village; putting in work for her at half cost, and running round the country in his car, getting chickens and eggs for her.

He stood extraordinarily well, too, with all local tribunals and courts. He had absolutely established the thesis with them—an indispensable business. But friends at court gave him the tip to find substitutes. "You can't go yourself; but show you take the patriotic view, in depleting your business, sparing every available soul—no matter how inconvenient."

He acted quickly on the hint. He sent from the furniture store a good staunch fellow, whose only drawbacks were obesity and defective vision, and got the man's own father to replace him. He sent the man who drove the carts, and entrusted his valuable horses and vehicles to mere boys. He sent the gray-haired foreman of ironmongery; and then, as a last substitute, at very considerable inconvenience, he parted with Logan, who had been with him from the first days of the boom—a real worker of the good, old-fashioned sort.

Old Logan did not want to go, even after an

appeal to his patriotism had been made. How could he?—he asked—with an ailing wife and a family of young children.

"*They'll* be all right," said Mr. Veal encouragingly. "The State's not going to let them come to want while you're doing your duty."

"It isn't fair," said Logan, limping through the yard with a bale of oilcloth on his shoulder. "I ain't up to it."

"The country is in danger," said Mr. Veal, following him. "The collapse of our principal ally has altered the whole complexion of affairs. If you realized all that's at stake, you wouldn't hesitate."

"Then why don't you go yourself?"

"I can't be spared."

"Who can't spare you?"

"The Authorities." Then Mr. Veal lost his temper. "Look here. I'm disgusted with you. Take your week's money and clear out of this. I've kept you so far out of charity, but I'm fed up with it."

"You've kep' me—out—of—charity?" The man was wounded to the heart. "*You* say that, after the way I've worked fer you these three years?"

Then came the awful advance of fifty—fifty—

five—and the announcement of the new comb-out. And that night Mr. Veal did not sleep a wink. Monstrous! He thought of bayonet fighting; and the thought of it made him first perspire and then come all over deadly cold. He was so *fit*. This talk of grading was more than half buncombe; no one could rely on promises and precautions; the government were reckless now. They would use him—as food for cannon.

In the morning he was all right again. He felt disgusted; but sure, after calm reflection, that they would not touch him. And he boldly spoke of his disgust. "I call it throwing up the sponge. What effect will it have on the enemy? They're cute enough to see through it. How can it help but hearten them an' put fresh courage into 'em? They'll read it as a public admission that we are done—to go and call up men of fifty and fifty-five."

But he had changed his mind about it by the time he met the vicar. He knew he was safe, and he said, "It's *right*, sir. We're face to face with the biggest proposition in hist'ry. No half measures."

"I admire your spirit," said the vicar. "I always have. You teach us all a lesson."

"No, no, sir—I can't admit that a moment."

"Yet you are willing, at your age, to lay aside everything?"

And Veal answered, with perfect truth, "I am as ready to go to-day as I was a year ago. . . . Only," he added impressively, "the military have themselves decided that I am more use to them here where I am than I should be over there."

Then, after a little while, he got another tip from the general or the general's lady. It is all very well to say that his business is indispensable, but is *he* indispensable to the business? Some one has said that his wife could run it, that she does, in fact, run it while he is all over the place with his motor-car.

That evening after supper he had a talk with his wife. They were alone in the comfortable dining-room; although spring was coming on again, the wood fire that crackled and blazed cheerfully could not be considered an extravagance, for it was cold out-of-doors.

"This war is an awful affair," he began, using a leader in the newspaper to set him going. "The more one envisages it, the more overwhelming it appears. I regard it now as a crusade—it's the struggle for right against wrong;" and he looked at her. "Every man, woman, and child who can strike a blow for England is wanted. No consid-

erations must be allowed to hold one back. If one can help, one must go. This applies to our household, as much as to the humblest cottage. We've no right to put the business on a pinnacle, thinking of what's best for its welfare."

"No. Does this mean you've made up your mind to go?"

"No. For *me* it's out of the question. It's you I'm thinking of. Nell, I know your noble sentiment about it, the things you've said, the fine manner in which you've expressed your ideas of it ever since it began. Well, if you feel restless and unhappy at me holding you back, I—I won't stand in your way."

"But what could I do?"

And he said there were these W.A.A.C.'s, and the other corps, half a dozen corps. "Don't you be afraid that you won't be jumped at, Nellie. You are young and strong. See what you've gone through without flinching in the work of the business. You have got the physique as well as the spirit. *You'd* never break down."

She had risen from her chair, and was walking about the room. Her cheeks had flushed and her eyes glowed; he saw that she was taking fire at the notion.

"Mind you," he went on, "it's pretty rough on

me. But at the point of crisis we have reached, nothing and nobody is to be allowed to count in the balance." And he told her how "the Authorities" refused to let him go himself. He had had a heart-to-heart talk with the general; and his place is here, helping the troops. He, as the brains of the business, can't be spared. She, as the manager, can.

She took fire, and went. It was, she felt, what she had always wanted to do. He saw her off at the railway station, just as he had seen off everybody else in these long sad years.

"Good-by, Nell. Be of good cheer. I seem almost like the poor old camel—this is the last straw, parting with you." And he spoke cheerily, patting her shoulder, kissing her, and buying her an illustrated newspaper. She was not yet in uniform. She would go straight to London and enlist there in the corps that most needed recruits, do her training, and qualify herself for service oversea. "Good-by. My word, shan't I be proud of you when all's over and you come back safe and sound?"

He stood waving his handkerchief as the train carried her away.

He felt that he must be safe now. Nothing

could touch him. A little lonely—but he scarcely noticed that; he was so busy. The business was going stronger than ever. The profit was almost farcical. You could sell a sixpenny photograph frame for half a sovereign. The amount of his purchases of war bonds seemed fabulous as he ran through private papers late at night, and he congratulated himself on having avoided ostentation by buying in a quiet confidential manner, instead of flourishing a check book at public meetings. Yet, in spite of all this, he was not truly easy in his mind. The world had been upside down long enough. It was time it righted itself. Things were too precarious—even when feeling secure, you never knew that the solid ground would not fail under your feet. Peace would ruin the business; but he had made his pile, and was ready to retire.

He talked very like a Pacifist sometimes.

“After all, what are we fighting for? What were our aims, as recited by responsible statesmen in the autumn of 1914, and repeated by others, times and often since then? Don’t tell me that the Germans haven’t had their bellyful of war. *They* won’t want to begin again.”

Then came the catastrophe. A sudden rumor floated round the village, a wild tale that all the

troops were leaving, that the camps and hospitals and barracks were to be vacated, that other camps were to be used somewhere else. Mr. Veal sprang into his motor-car and dashed off to the G.O.C.'s headquarters.

The general was packing; the general's lady had already packed and gone; an aide-de-camp gave him a brief interview. Yes, in confidence, the whole place was to be abandoned.

"But *why?*"

"Ask me an easier one," said the A.D.C. genially. And he added, as a possible explanation, that perhaps the authorities had some scientific fears about polluted ground. Troops are like poultry: they should not be kept too long on the same bit of ground.

In ten days they had all vanished—the village was exactly what it had been four years ago, and Veal's business had dropped to the original nothing. It was impossible now to say that he was indispensable to troops, because there were no troops left within fifteen miles.

He struggled hard to avoid and evade, but it was useless. They graded him in the top class; and that, as every one said, meant that it was only a question of time before he was pushed out into a place of danger.

Nevertheless, he put a good face on it.

"I must say," said the vicar, "that, everything considered, it is rather rough luck on you."

"Not a bit," said Mr. Veal jauntily. "I was always ready to go, and I wish they had let me go at first."

"I always admired your spirit."

"Thank you, sir," said Veal.

And he went, seen off by many friends.

A month later he reappeared in all his glory—an *officer*. He was engaged in the Refreshment Branch of the Army, Home Service, and had just been gazetted as Honorary Temporary Captain while so employed.

JOAN OF ARC

ADELAIDE, the under housemaid at Belmont, was a very shy, diffident girl; so much so, that, dressing for her evening out, she blushed at the sight of her brilliant new hat. She felt that if she had been pretty, it would have been easy enough to carry off such a hat; but she wasn't pretty, like Edith the parlor-maid, and she knew it. She was not grand and dashing like Mrs. Vaughan, the cook; not elegant and graceful, like Emily, the head housemaid; not even black-haired and pale-faced, or full of fascinating sauciness and impudence, like Loo, the kitchen-maid. When chaffed, she never had an answer ready, and if she thought of one afterward she was too timid to go back and say it.

She looked out of the window of her attic bedroom and wondered if Lyndhurst, the small house on the other side of the road, would ever let again. It was beginning to have a shabby, war-battered aspect, in painful contrast to the general prosperity of Hill Road. Between the side walls of Lyndhurst and the villa next to it she had a fine view of the clustering roofs of the suburb;

and farther off she could see the open country, and the main line of the South Western Railway, along which the troop trains had already been running for nearly three years. Unseen, at the bottom of Hill Road, was the corner round which you plunged into traffic, gaiety, noise—trams and omnibuses passing by; the big public houses, shops, cinema theaters; life. It was at this corner that young men used to hang about, waiting for the young ladies of Hill Road on their evenings out. But no young man had ever waited there for Adelaide.

Thinking of the corner, she felt almost too shy to face it—especially in her new hat. But it was her evening out, and she had to go out. Presently she had sidled round the corner, and was in the crowd of the big street. In spite of the hat, nobody took the least notice of her; she might have been invisible; and gradually she became less self-conscious and more capable of enjoying her promenade. By the time she had reached the third picture palace and was standing outside it, looking at the posters and the photographs, she had quite forgotten herself.

“JOAN OF ARC: The film that aroused a nation.” She stood gaping at the highly-colored portrait of a young lady in armor on a white horse.

"Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday. Do not miss it. It has moved young and old, on both sides of the Atlantic. You can not see it and go away just the same as you were before."

What did that last bit mean? Adelaide raised her gloved hand and felt her hat, with a return of uneasiness. And then the young soldier spoke to her.

"Going inside?"

"Beg pardon?" said Adelaide, almost fainting from the suddenness of this surprise attack.

"I passed the remark whether you were going in to see the show."

"I wasn't intending," Adelaide gasped.

"No more was I," said the soldier; "that is, not alone. But I don't mind if you don't. Shall us?"

Adelaide was speechless.

"Come on, then," said the soldier; and he led her through the hall to the pay-box.

"I got my purse," said Adelaide, finding her voice in the closeness of the danger.

"I treat."

"Oh, no—please."

He had done it, paid for both; and next moment he was holding her firmly by the arm, guiding her through the darkness, keeping her off many toes that she would otherwise have martyred, pre-

venting her from sitting on a strange gentleman's lap, and finally depositing her in an unoccupied seat side by side with himself. Her heart was beating wildly, her thoughts were in a whirl. She was out with a soldier, being stood treat to the pictures. Breathing fast, she peered toward the stage.

It was the end of a prairie sketch. As usual, the sheriff and his *posse* were arriving at a gallop. They released the men bound to the tree, and the lights went up; and Adelaide saw the closely-packed audience, and stealthily glanced at her soldier. He was sunburnt, young, fair-haired.

"War nougat," said a brightly-dressed girl attendant, coming along the gangway with a small tray of boxes. "War nougat. Nougat bits. Very sweet. Nice nutty flavor."

"Here, miss," said the soldier. "Give me a box, please. How much?"

"Two shillings. Thank you."

"Do you eat that stuff?" asked Adelaide, determined to make conversation.

"No, but I expect you do;" and he handed her the box of war sweets.

"Oh, no, I couldn't think—I can't allow——"

"Gammon. Don't be huffy about it. Why not? I meant no offense."

And Adelaide, to her indescribable surprise, saw that he was blushing; and a wonderful but very comfortable idea flashed into her mind. Could it be possible that he was almost as shy by nature as she was?

"I'm not offended," she hastened to assure him. "I think it's very kind of you, only——"

"That's all right, then," and he smiled at her. "I'm on leave, I am. I saved up for it."

The lights went down, and a brief, exhilarating interlude entitled *The Runaway Motor-car* was vividly presented. Adelaide sucked her sweets, laughed at the runaway car until she nearly choked. When the lights went up again the soldier was wiping tears from his eyes.

"I do like a laugh," he explained, as he slowly recovered his composure. "My name's Budd—Dick Budd. You haven't told me your name yet."

"My name's Cross—Ad'laide Cross," said Adelaide, carefully imitating the formula.

"I'm out in France, with my battalion. The Sixteenth Battalion."

"It's dreadful out there, isn't it?"

"No, it's right enough."

"You say that, but I don't expect you mean it."

"O' course I do," and he looked hard at her, as though not understanding why she should doubt his word.

"Were you always a soldier—I mean, before the war?"

"No, I was in a warehouse."

Never in her life had Adelaide experienced such a sequence of pleasurable sensations—delicious flutter of excitement, laughter, sucking sweets; and now an unforced flow of conversation; a swiftly-evoked, mysterious sympathy that made companionship joy, that destroyed bashfulness.

"When it's over, what will you do—go back into business?"

"Not me, Ad'laide. No, I shall go out to the colonies."

Then the lights went down again, and the piece of the evening began.

One was introduced to a charming American girl, who had dressed for a fancy ball as Joan of Arc. In this costume she showed herself to her elder brother, a man of considerable position under the government, who expressed admiration of the attractive costume by face and gesture, and finally asked her a simple question in large, plain handwriting.

"Who was Joan of Arc?"

No question could have been more opportune; for most of the audience, including Adelaide, were anxious for further information on the point.

The young lady replied to him with a concise written statement; and, time being permitted for it to soak into the audience, all became duly seized of the historical or traditional facts, with regard to the Maid of Orleans.

The elder brother immediately changed the conversation, becoming frowningly serious, and saying to his sister:

"The war is not going well. There are too many sleepers. I despair of waking them."

Then, after the ball, the young lady went about America on a white horse, with a banner, and woke the sleepers. Everybody flocked to the banner. The women as well as the men—both sexes could help.

But this was not all. Next one saw her in the war itself. She had traveled the horse, and on its back in France she did remarkable things. The generals trusted her more and more; and when they had given her full powers, she fairly got the Huns on the run. But at length the routed commander-in-chief of the enemy by subterfuge, captured her, and shot her as vengeance, while the whole mob were hurrying back to Berlin. Her last words flashed upon the screen.

"I do not die in vain. Those I have awakened will not sleep till the work is done."

Of course the unrolling of this drama took a considerable time; the film was a long one; intervals were allowed. During the intervals Adelaide talked volubly to her companion. Her face was flushed, her eyes glowed, her voice shook a little with emotion; she had been carried completely out of herself. She was a different girl. But for the hat, her fellow servants would not have recognized her if they had seen her chattering to the soldier.

"Dick, is it like that out there?"

"Well, I can't exactly say I've seen such things myself. I been mostly in Flanders and down by Arras. I don't quite follow how she got up so far like. Mostly the girls—you know, the ones in khaki as well as the nurses—aren't allowed to come up beyond the principal headquarters. I should have thought the military police would have stopped her."

"But it was the generals invited her—to save the situation."

"Ah!"

"Dick. Tell me true. Where the girls do get to—are they ever under fire?"

"You bet. They get shelled proper now and again. Why, you'll see the nurses' names in the lists."

"Then if a girl showed herself what Joan of Arc showed herself!"

Dick saw her home right up Hill Road to the gate of Belmont, where they lingered, talking confidentially. It was a splendid summer night, and Adelaide looked up at the moonlit sky, wondering if the fine atmospheric conditions would tempt Hun raiders. Instead of thinking about the coal cellar as a refuge, she imagined herself seated in a battle plane high up there, waiting to drive off the intruders. She felt like a sleeper awakened; great thoughts stirred in her.

"Ad'laide, you see I like you."

"I like you too, Dick."

They promised to write to each other, and moved up the road a little way to exchange postal addresses, that they scribbled in the shaded light by a lamp-post.

"I shall come straight to see you next leave. I'd come again this leave, if I wasn't booked down home at Poole."

"You mayn't find me here, Dick. But I'll write and tell you, wherever I go to."

"Promise—and kiss on your promise. I like you, Ad'laide."

"I like you, Dick. But, Dick, I shan't never marry you unless I feel I'm worthy of you."

"Well, I haven't gone so far as to ask you that, have I?" Then, as if struck by an ungallant turn in these words, or as if suddenly making up his mind, he said with firmness, "But, you know, I want for us to be engaged like."

Adelaide answered not firmly of tone, for there was a little break in her voice, but with a decision of purpose that was unmistakable.

"No, Dick, you go away from me free, an' you'll come back to me free. Think of your duty first, an' me afterwards. An', an' remember my words. I shan't never consent to marry you unless I feel in me own self I'm worthy of you."

As Adelaide said these and other astounding things, trifling with an offer that would have seemed fantastically advantageous a few hours ago, she looked upward to the summer sky. Tears had come to her eyes, and unconsciously she raised her hand, assuming the exact attitude of the film young lady during the delivery of that last speech. "Those I have awakened will not sleep until the work is done."

"I shan't change my mind, Ad'laidé."

"Nor mine. Good-by, dear."

And they hugged and parted.

With the feel of his lips still on her face and the pressure of his arms still seeming to encircle

her body, Adelaide stood by the kitchen table at Belmont and talked to her fellow-servants.

"I don't understand you," said Mrs. Vaughan, the cook, loftily.

"And I don't understand *you*," said Adelaide. "But I begin to. There's many things in this house wants understanding. The missis—Mrs. Carter—she's easily understood. Keep the home fires burning. That's to say, five able-bodied women who might be helping to win the war kep' here to coddle and fuss over one idle woman—and her a widow, too. Funny she and the dog would look if they met the enemy advancing round the corner!"

"Oh, we've heard that tale before," said Edith, the parlor-maid.

"And much *you'd* have done to prevent it coming true. You take the dog out regular, don't you, morning and evening, in almost all weathers? And Mrs. Carter she gives you a blouse—one she's tired of wearing—for your devotion to Bingo, doesn't she? I understand that part of it. But I tell you, Cook, and you, too, Edith—I tell the lot of you, I don't understand how you've the face to carry on with it. And I don't understand how you'll look—but precious foolish, I guess—when the boys come home an' ask you, some of 'em, what you've done to help the cause."

It was not new; but, coming from such a quarter, it created a considerable sensation. In the old-fashioned melodramas an immense effect used to be produced when the supposed deaf mute, suddenly abandoning disguise, defied and harangued his oppressors; and the effect of Adelaide's outburst was essentially of the same character. She, the tongue-tied, the down-trodden, had found a voice and disclosed herself as outrageously uppish in spirit. Surprise robbed her hearers of all power of repartee; for once it was they and not Adelaide who had no answer ready. No saucy or impudence came from Loo, not a flash from Emily; one after another they drifted away in crestfallen silence, leaving Adelaide seated on a corner of the kitchen table and negligently swinging by its strings the new hat.

Mrs. Vaughan was the last to go, after bolting doors and locking cupboards. Yesterday she would have ordered Adelaide out of her kitchen before retiring herself. To-night she said, "Turn the lights off, please, when you come up."

"All right, Cook," said Adelaide.

Next day she gave notice, announcing as her reason for departure that she felt "a call" to go straight out to the war.

"Something of this has reached my ears

already," said Mrs. Carter; "and I think you are talking, and evidently wanting to act, in a foolish manner—in a manner rather ungrateful to *me*, Adelaide, who have tried so hard to keep things together, and make you all comfortable, during this dreadful war, at great sacrifices to myself."

In fact, this was the first defection in the domestic ranks, and Mrs. Carter had considered the matter with care. She did not attach any value to Adelaide's services; if the truth must be confessed, Adelaide, as well as being shy and awkward, had shown herself to be slack and incompetent; so that, in spite of the disgusting difficulties of life caused by this wretched war, Mrs. Carter did not doubt that she could secure a better second housemaid in Adelaide's place. But the danger was that the rest of the household might be upset. Anything to prevent that. When one goes, another follows. Stifling her pride and irritation, therefore, Mrs. Carter spoke to the would-be deserter in a tone of affectionate sympathy.

"Adelaide, I honor the emotion that moves you, and I'll say no more of my own wishes. But, with the best will in the world, you don't know what you are undertaking. Believe me, you are not strong enough."

"Joan of Arc," said Adelaide, "was only a poor weak girl. Yet she drove the English out of France."

"But you don't want to do that," said Mrs. Carter. "Now you're talking like a pro-German. I don't think you know yourself *what* you want."

"Oh, yes, I do," said Adelaide. "I want to fight for the freedom of the world, and not lie snug a-bed and eat regular meals here, when half humanity's starving and bleeding."

After that there was no more to be said. The only thing was to get rid of her at once.

"But leaving me, as you do," said Mrs. Carter, "without serving your month, you go, of course, without your money."

"I prefer to go without my money," said Adelaide loftily.

Within an hour she had packed her trunk, and a taxi-cab stood outside the front door of Belmont.

"Good-by," said Adelaide to her fellow-servants. "You won't never see me again."

They clustered at the side entrance and on the gravel drive to watch her roll away; and Mrs. Carter came down among them, laying dignity aside for once, and encouraging them to mock and make merry at the deserter's expense. She was most anxious to shatter any dangerous thoughts

that might have been set working. Nothing is so efficacious as ridicule.

"Joan of Arc!" said Mrs. Carter, laughing as if hugely amused. "She called herself Joan of Arc. Joan of Arc going to buy a tin sword and a paste-board helmet." And she laughed again. "Oh, dear, how silly people can be!"

And by the way in which the servants laughed and echoed the name Joan of Arc she felt sure that the danger was averted.

Adelaide tried to be a W.A.A.C., to be a W.R.E.N., and A.S.C. M.T, a V.A.D.; she tried for all the letters of the alphabet; but everywhere she was rejected. Most unfortunately for her, at this period the Authorities had decided that they did not want any more women for service with the armies in France. People at recruiting offices sent Adelaide on to munitions; but here again she met with disappointment. None but skilled hands were required. Everywhere she was confronted with lists of printed questions; and when she showed that she had no qualifications for war work, people asked her, orally, even more distressing questions.

"Can you cook?"

"Are you a really good housemaid?"

"Have you had practise in waiting at table?"

There was a chance, possibly, of putting her into a work-girls' canteen; but even this chance soon vanished. Besides, she did not want to wash plates or sweep floors here in England; she wanted to get across the water and do great deeds in France. The spirit that had been aroused in her still burned brightly, but the sense of failure fell cold upon her. At night she used to weep piteously, thinking of her soldier boy and all the other brave lads out there; and in imagination she saw the uniformed girls waving their hands to them, calling out "Cheerio," perhaps even blowing kisses to them as they marched by, along the dusty roads up toward the battle front. Why might not she do even so much as that? Why was fate so cruel?

She had spent nearly all her savings; she dared not go home to her mother and father in Wiltshire—mother would not understand why she had given up her situation, and father was so old-fashioned a parent that there was no knowing what he might not do to one, if really angry. At last, driven by necessity, she accepted the offer of a domestic servant's place.

The offer came from a lady that she had met at some employment committee rooms; a business-like, quick-speaking lady, called Miss Finlayson,

who led her into the secretary's office and addressed her with confidential briskness.

"By an accident, it so happens that I am in sore need of a housemaid. Three kept—cook, house, and parlor. Happy, comfortable home—but mind you, I expect to see the work properly done. Very good. Then I am prepared to take you at once—if character from last place proves satisfactory."

"The lady I was with," said Adelaide, "couldn't but give me a good character—but, ma'am, I simply can't apply for it."

"Why?"

Poor Adelaide explained all the circumstances. She had left in order to enroll herself in the army; she had spoken strongly on the duty of giving your life to your country; they had attempted to laugh her down. If they learned that all the fine talk had ended in this, they would laugh louder than ever.

"What was the lady's name and address?"

"I'd rather not tell you even that," said Adelaide. "I don't want no communication of any sort with them."

Miss Finlayson looked hard at Adelaide, and then came to a prompt decision.

"Adelaide, I will risk it. You appear honest.

Your story is corroborated—to a certain extent—by your applications here and elsewhere. Come early to-morrow morning. It is a thing I would never have done in peace-time. But the times are *not* normal, there's no getting away from it."

And she told Adelaide how to find Number 18, Berwick Road, Hammersmith.

"I am moving from there shortly," she added, with briskness, but in a kind tone. "I have taken a house farther out—and you will all be happier there—better air, countrified surroundings."

"Yes, ma'am."

"The house I have taken needs considerable repairs, and I am having great difficulty with the landlord, who is grasping, dilatory and shifty. However, directly I have forced him to fulfill his bargain and render the place habitable, I move in. The war is made an excuse nowadays for repudiating all obligations—but we won't discuss that. Good night."

Adelaide settled down in Berwick Road, and a dull apathy possessed her. It was a relief, perhaps, to have some regular meals again, for she had been going rather short of food lately; but she felt that her heart was almost broken. In spite of every effort to appear cheerful, she wrote dolorous letters to Private Budd, B.E.F.

Her fellow-servants were easy enough to get on with, and they left her unmolested in her sadness. They were nothing like so fine and ladylike as the maids at Mrs. Carter's. The cook had been married twice, both times unhappily, and she sighed and philosophized over her cooking. "Seems," she said, "all the men's getting killed off, and there'll be fewer fools and more single women next generation." The parlor-maid snored at night, and she liked several glasses of beer during the day. She used to ask plaintively if beer would go back to its proper strength when peace was declared.

They saw little of their mistress, who was out early and late at her committees and hospitals. She worked hard herself, and she did not like to see others slacking. She blended something of the war spirit into her admonitions, but to Adelaide it did not seem to be the real true flame of patriotism.

"Now, don't go to sleep over it—not in war time," Miss Finlayson would say. "Remember there's a war on. We all have to do our bit. And one can do one's bit here just as usefully as anywhere else."

Nevertheless, on the whole, Adelaide liked her in a dull apathetic way; and she accepted occasional rebukes without murmuring.

After about a month the household moved. Miss Finlayson carried through the operation as though she had been a regimental transport officer, ordering about the old men as they loaded the two pantechnicon vans, inspecting the rather scraggy horses, and seeing that they were properly fed before she gave the word to move off. She had secured a private omnibus for herself, the three servants, and all the light baggage. There was so much of this light stuff that it seemed as if they would never pack in. But Miss Finlayson managed it somehow; and off they went, so deeply buried in parcels that they could scarcely see one another. Adelaide sat nursing band-boxes, brooding sadly, and looking with lack-luster eyes at vistas of unknown streets as the omnibus slowly and heavily jogged along. It was a tedious, unending drive.

"Now, we are not far off," said Miss Finlayson, at last.

Adelaide had been dreaming. She roused herself, and, glancing through the window of the omnibus door with faintly awakened interest, gave a little start. She had seen this street before; that bootshop was an old friend—one, two, three cinema palaces, all three familiar to her. At the place where roads meet, among the trams,

near the corner by the big public houses, the omnibus lurched and began to turn in the direction of Hill Road.

"Where are we going?" gasped Adelaide.
"What's the name of your house?"

"Lyndhurst," said Miss Finlayson briskly. "We are close to it now. I recognize the acacia tree."

In another minute the omnibus stopped outside the newly painted woodwork of Lyndhurst. It was the little unoccupied house immediately opposite to Belmont, Adelaide's old home.

She was overwhelmed.

Her main thought was to escape discovery by the servants at Belmont. She tried also to hide from tradesmen's boys who might recognize her. She never went out except after dark, and then heavily veiled. But it was all no good. One morning the milkman spotted her cleaning the steps of Lyndhurst.

"Bless me! Miss Cross, isn't it—that used to be over the way?"

A day or two afterward he addressed her facetiously, and she knew at once that he had betrayed her.

"Yes, they *was* surprised across the road. They all sends their compliments. They tell me," and

he sniggered, "as you've changed your name. Not Ad'laide any more, but Jane. Jane of Hark, eh? Haw, haw!"

It was bitter to think of how they were all deriding her. From the windows of Lyndhurst she saw one or other of them many times in the day—Edith, elegant and mincing, as she emerged early of a morning with the odious dog Bingo; the black-haired Loo without her hat, dancing down the road to fetch potted meat from the grocer's; Mrs. Vaughan, dressed like a duchess, issuing forth to pay the weekly books. Mrs. Carter had kept her command together; all of them were still there—although the milkman said that Loo had some ideas of going on the music-hall stage and earning big money.

As the months passed Adelaide carried a heart of lead beneath her print and serge dresses. Nowhere but here would she have suffered so grievously from the sense of failure. She was sustained only by two letters from Private Budd. In one of these he said, "I have not changed my mind;" in the other he said, "We been through a lot lately;" and at the end of each he set down signs of multiplication that meant kisses. She cried over these letters in secret, but there was bitterness to her even in the affectionate symbols.

She was not worthy of him, and never likely to be. When she read the war news, and tried to imagine what he and the others were enduring, she felt that she would not be able to look him in the face—if he ever returned to her.

Very dark thoughts came to poor Adelaide now that all the bright ones had gone. She had been ready to give her life to her country, but they would not take it; and she thought sometimes that she would take it herself.

Then Miss Finlayson's parlor-maid left, and Adelaide took on the parlor-maid's work as well as her own. She did not mind the extra labor; indeed, in that it gave her less time for sad reveries, it was welcome. Miss Finlayson praised her highly for thus throwing herself into the breach.

"I hope to relieve you by the week-end, Adelaide; and I'm really grateful for the way you've tackled it."

"Oh, it's nothing," said Adelaide.

"How do you mean nothing? I think it's a great deal, and you've done it splendidly."

"It's all child's play," said Adelaide, "compared with what they're doing out in France."

"*Bravo!*" cried Miss Finlayson cordially. "*That's* the spirit," and she gave Adelaide a pat of approval on the shoulder.

A little later it was agreed between them that the parlor-maid should not be replaced; Adelaide would carry on.

She worked hard now, harder and harder. She had, it must be owned, never really worked before; but that thought of France and what was happening there made toil seem easy and fatigue one's proper portion. She used to say to herself, "If I'd had my wish and been accepted, I'd never have been off duty; I'd have had to march fifteen miles on end like those girls in the newspaper; I'd 'a' bin busy all through the night as well as day." So she took a sort of melancholy pleasure in not sparing herself; she did far more than was necessary; and soon she began to find in the work almost an anodyne for failure and disappointment.

"It is no compliment," said Miss Finlayson. "You are making me a good deal more comfortable than when we had Eliza."

"Oh, don't mention it, ma'am," said Adelaide.

During the fogs and frosts of winter the cook's health began to fail, and, unknown to Miss Finlayson, Adelaide was doing a lot of cook's work also. Adelaide liked it; this learning how to cook brought a new faint interest to her weary life. The cook used to sit in an armchair by the dresser, sighing, and giving directions.

"Have you buttered your pan? Good. Then pour in slow and steady. Now keep stirring. Ah, me, I shan't last much longer, Adelaide; I'm breaking up fast. Two bad 'usbands have made an old woman of me before my time. Don't let it boil, whatever you do. Good cooking, Ad'laide, is just care and taking pains—nothing else."

Up-stairs in the dining-room Adelaide asked shyly, while she cleared the table, "Did you like the cabinet pudding, ma'am?"

"Yes. Tell Mrs. Smiles *excellent*. I must say old Smiles can cook plain fare against anybody. If she ever broke down I don't know what I should do. The war is making existence more difficult every day. Cooks are like diamonds now—fetch any money."

In February the blow that Miss Finlayson dreaded fell upon her: Mrs. Smiles showed symptoms of pleurisy and had to be removed to a hospital. Adelaide carried on. "If you don't mind," she said, "I'd much prefer you didn't get another. I shall be happier doing it all alone, and I promise you shan't suffer."

"Adelaide, I admire your pluck and good feeling, but you really can't do the work of *three*. You will simply kill yourself in attempting it."

"Oh, no, ma'am, that's all right. Give me a trial anyways."

The trial was made, and Miss Finlayson did not suffer—far from it. She had never been so comfortable in her life. Adelaide, always improving, by the summer had developed into that greatest of household treasures, a perfect general servant. It was not only that she got through the work of three people, she did it so much better. The brass was always shining, the steps were spotless, the hot water was never cold; and as a *tour de force*, or crowning proof of energy, Adelaide allotted a day in each week to give one of the rooms a thorough spring cleaning.

"Oh, my dear girl," said Miss Finlayson one evening in a burst of genuine enthusiasm after her good dinner. "What a wife you will make! What a wife you will make, some day, when the war is over!"

Adelaide flushed, then turned pale, and her lips trembled.

"Are you engaged, Adelaide?"

"No, ma'am. But I have a friend, and I'm very anxious about him;" and Adelaide began to cry.

It was so long since she had heard from him, and she doubted if her own letters ever reached him. At night she used to have dreadful dreams that he was killed, or taken prisoner, or that he had quite forgotten her. But for the hard work,

she would have gone out of her mind from anxiety. Then, when the summer was nearly over, the milkman brought across the road a letter that Dick had addressed to her at Belmont. Her hand shook so much that the milkman had to carry the milk for her into the kitchen. She waited until he had gone before she opened Dick's letter.

He was alive, not a prisoner, and he still remembered her. He had been transferred to another battalion, which had done a lot of moving about as well as a lot of fighting. But now things were quieter, and he hoped to get a turn of leave before long. He reproached her for not writing, and he put a great number of signs of multiplication or addition after his signature.

That afternoon she overcame her pride and reluctance, and, going across the road, faced her old fellow-servants at Belmont. It was an ordeal, but it had to be gone through. She was obliged to ask them a favor. She begged that if her soldier turned up there looking for her, he might be sent at once to the correct address. She could not risk the chance of misunderstanding or delay when Dick came round the corner and up Hill Road.

"A soldier?" said Loo wickedly. "I suppose you mean a brother officer?"

"Yes, of course," said Mrs. Vaughan, "she's a '*General*' now, and we mustn't forget it."

And they chaffed her unmercifully.

"To be sure. When you went into the army we knew you'd do well, but we never thought you'd go up so rapid as to be a '*General*' within the year. No one under you, and no one above you—you must feel grand. People used to look down on '*Generals*' in the old days, counting them as mere drudges; but times are changed, aren't they, Emily?"

Adelaide bore it all without flinching, or attempting to answer back. She felt the pin-pricks, but they were nothing to what she had experienced from her own thoughts.

It was in September when he came, still daylight after a warm day; and by providential good fortune Miss Finlayson was dining out and would not be back till late. They went out together, and along unfrequented footpaths between the villas and the fields. At such moments as the paths were quite empty they did a lot of hugging; and, really, to any tender-hearted person it would have been touching to hear them talk to each other.

Adelaide told him all about it—her high aspirations, her vow to do something great or perish in the attempt, and her total and miserable

failure. Before she had finished she was sobbing on his shoulder.

"I tried, Dick—I did try. An' they, they wouldn't let me. An' I've worked, Dick. I've learnt to cook real well. I do the whole house for her, and she praises me. I'm not the helpless, useless girl I was—but when I think of all I dreamed and hoped, I feel I've nothing to live for, and I want to go straight to the river and commit suicide."

"No, don't do that," said Dick. "Live for my sake. We'll be married soon's the war's over. And we'll light out for the colonies. All this cooking and housekeeping, what you speak of, will come in very handy out there."

Then they went to the cinema theater—the one where they had first met—and sat with clasped hands, except when the lights were up. They saw runaway motor-cars, and jolly Wild West scenes with the sheriff and his *posse*; and Adelaide felt happy again.

THE END





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